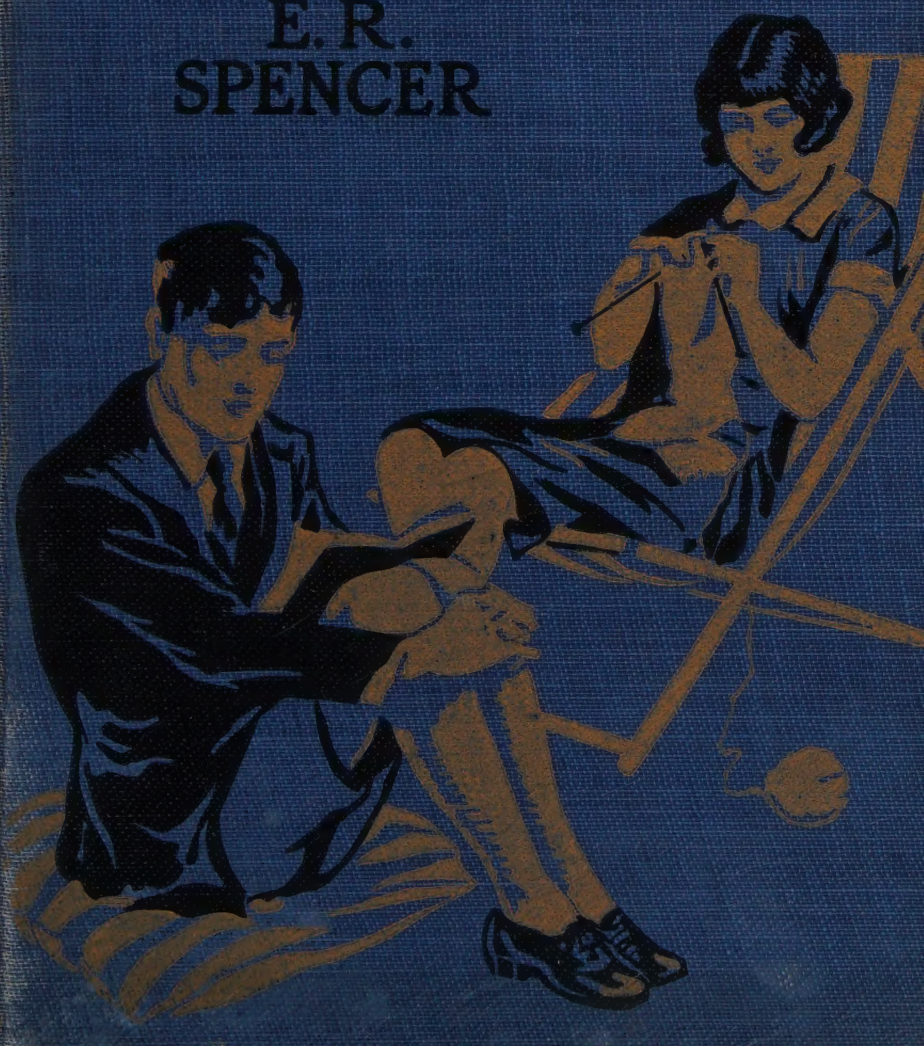
CONTRABAND:
A Tale of Modern Smugglers

E. R. SPENCER



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"'Good heavens!' cried Captain Stanley. 'Dare, my boy! Are you hurt?'" (*See page* 160.)

Contraband

A Tale of Modern Smugglers

By

E. R. Spencer

Author of "A Young Sea Rover," etc.

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CONTRABAND

A TALE OF MODERN SMUGGLERS

CHAPTER I

ON BOARD THE "GLENBOW"

THE mail packet S.S. *Glenbow*, ploughing her way up the south-west coast of Newfoundland in a beam sea and half a gale of wind, rolled rail in rail out as she neared St. Lawrence.

Dare Stanley, who had been lying down in his berth, felt the necessity of fresh air, and slipping on an oilskin coat he made his way on deck. The air was fresh enough there in all conscience! He found all but the bridge deserted; the heavy sea made a stay on deck undesirable. Yet he did not wish to return to his cabin, having a desire for company of some sort, so, watching his chance, he fought his way aft to where the smoke-room was situated.

Short as was the trip, he was drenched and had the breath half knocked out of him

before he could gain sanctuary. Once he reached the smoke-room he had to exert all his strength to open the door, which was pressed to as with a vice by the weight of the wind. He managed to get it open enough to slip inside, when the door closed precipitately behind him and knocked him halfway across the room.

He was helped to his feet by the chief engineer, who was seated at a card-table with the captain and two passengers. Three other passengers completed the company.

"Hello, young Stanley!" shouted the captain, who was a friend of Dare's father. "Bit rough outside, is it?"

Dare showed his teeth in a grin for answer, and stripped himself of his oilskins, while the company returned to consideration of the game his entry had interrupted. It was soon finished. The captain, who was partnered with one of the passengers, showed great good humour as he drew in his share of the winnings. Not so the chief, who had lost.

"There ye are," said that disgruntled individual as he paid out. "Man, dear, did ye ever see sich cards in all your born days! If my luck keeps bad I'll have to follow the lead of the fo'c'sle crew and play for tobacco."

This humorous sally was greeted by an appreciative guffaw.

"Speaking of tobacco," said one of the passengers during the conversational lull which followed, "I'm a living witness that the only way you can get rid of it on this coast is to give it away."

"That's so," agreed his companion. They were both, it seemed, representatives of tobacco firms. "And of all the places on the coast Saltern Bay is the worst."

"It's a crying shame!"

This topic in lieu of a better was seized upon as likely to yield something of interest.

"How's that, Mr. Parsons?" said the captain insinuatingly.

"Smuggling," answered Mr. Parsons tersely, and all the company, including Dare, pricked up their ears. For although this was a perennial subject of discussion, it never failed to rouse interest, for the simple reason that it touched nearly everyone's feelings or pockets, or both, in one way or another.

"Smuggling, sir," repeated Mr. Parsons. "Saltern Bay is a hotbed of smugglers. Mind you, I don't mind a man bringing in a little brandy or tobacco on the quiet free of duty, but when you get a gang of men

organizing a regular supply of the stuff and thus undermining the legitimate trade of the country, then I say it's time to stop it."

"You're right," asserted his colleague. "If I had my way I'd blow St. Pierre Colony sky-high out of water. Why we were ever fools enough to give it back to the French when once we'd won it, I don't know. It's been nothing but a thorn in the side of the tobacco business ever since."

"Oh come, Mr. Bayley," protested the captain good-humouredly; "you wouldn't go so far as that surely. St. Pierre is all right. A jolly little town in its way."

"And as for giving it back to the French," put in the chief, "man, there were reasons for that, diplomatic reasons which take no account of individual likes or dislikes. The English had to smooth down the French a little at the time, and the cheapest way of doing it was to cede them St. Pierre and the rights of fishing on the so-called French coast, an injustice to the islanders if there ever was one."

"I'm with you there," put in a passenger who had hitherto remained silent, a merchant from Bay de Verde.

"Well, I'm not worrying about the fish-

ing rights," said Mr. Parsons egoistically; "it's the tobacco rights I'm interested in."

"Of course," said the captain dryly.

"It's come to the time when the Government has got to take action or be for ever disgraced in the eyes of its electors," declared Mr. Parson's colleague somewhat grandiosely.

"Bad as that, is it?" said the captain, intent on drawing both men out.

"Worse," interpolated Mr. Parsons pessimistically. "Do you know the extent of my order for the district between Point Day and Barmitage Bay, captain? A measly five hundred dollars, on a route that ought to yield a three thousand dollar order every month."

"Umph!" The sympathetic articulation came from the chief, who had a just appreciation of figures as such. "Man, dear, the smugglers must be doing a roaring trade," he added, "for there's not a man on the coast that doesna' smoke or chew the weed."

"A true word," said Mr. Parsons sadly. "But what would you? Five out of ten of them do their own smuggling, and the rest are supplied by the smuggling gang.

It's impossible to compete with their cut-throat prices."

"A gang, is there?" inquired the captain, who had been up and down the coast for twenty years and probably knew more about Mr. Parsons' subject of grievance than that worthy himself did.

"Of course there's a gang, captain. There must be. There's a regular underground trade."

"What are the Revenue people doing?" put in the merchant from Bay de Verde.

"Bah!" Mr. Parsons expectorated in disgust, then attacked the Service in earnest.

"What do they ever do," he declared, "but send a dinky little gunboat up and down the coast?—a boat that every smuggler recognizes twenty miles away and avoids accordingly. What they need to do is to place men on land, not ten miles off it. Saltern Bay is honeycombed with coves and beaches where the smugglers can land and no one the wiser. Have a few men spying up and down the land. Let them keep their eyes open and find out the smugglers' cache—then make a raid. A few raids and smuggling wouldn't be so brisk, for smugglers can no more afford to lose their goods than other people."

Mr. Parsons' colleague nodded in agreement.

"I seem to remember hearing that the Customs at Saltern attempted something of that kind," hazarded the captain.

"Bah!" said Mr. Parsons. "Old man Johnson, sixty if he's a day, made a daylight trip to 'Madam's Notch' and found half a case of brandy and a few pounds of tobacco. There's those who believe the smugglers placed it there on purpose. I'm one of them. There's others who say that Johnson will never be a poor man if he lives to be a hundred and that the smugglers have made his inactivity worth while. He ought to be kicked out."

"He has been." Dare could not resist the opportunity of being the conveyor of new and interesting information.

Mr. Parsons and his colleague turned surprised looks on their informant.

"What's that!" ejaculated Mr. Parsons incredulously.

"Didn't you know?" said the captain easily, saving Dare the trouble of repeating his statement. "Johnson resigned about three weeks ago. Captain Stanley, this young man's father, has been appointed in his place."

"News to me," confessed Mr. Parsons.

"We've been on the Northern route this past month," informed Mr. Bayley in explanation.

"Seems to me," said Mr. Parsons after an appropriate silence and a hard scrutiny of Dare's countenance that caused the latter to change colour, "seems to me that I've heard of Captain Stanley before."

"Well, you ought to have done," the chief declared, "for there's not a man on the island has done more to rid the Revenue service of graft and sheer inefficiency."

"Oh, that's the man, is it? There was a question asked in the House about him, I remember. Well, good luck to him if he's bound on cleaning up Saltern Bay. All I can say is that he's got his work cut out, for there's not a cleverer or rougher lot ever swindled the Government out of revenue."

This point seemed to be mutually recognized as bringing an end to the conversation. The subject for the time being was dropped. Soon after, the captain withdrew to visit the bridge, and the chief, grumbling about cheap engines, went to see how those that were serving the *Glenbow* so well were progressing.

Dare was left with the four other

passengers, who were soon drawn irresistibly to the card table. But he paid little attention to his fellow-voyagers. His mind had been stimulated by the recent conversation and was busy formulating guesses as to the real situation in Saltern, and the likelihood of there being some excitement to relieve the monotony he must otherwise endure in a small village where he knew no one.

As the captain of the *Glenbow* had stated, Captain Stanley was Dare's father, and, more than that, he was something in the nature of a hero to his son. Bred to the merchant service, Captain Stanley had, after twenty-five years of the Western Ocean trade, retired from the sea and accepted from the Government a position as a special inspector in the Revenue Service.

That was five years ago, and they had been busy years, full of incident and sometimes yielding adventure. In the past year or two Dare had been taken a little into his father's confidence, and on one occasion had proved very useful in the solving of a particularly stiff problem centring upon illicit trading. When, therefore, his father had been appointed temporary Customs Officer at Saltern, the real reason for the appointment being the elimination of the smuggling

rife in the Saltern Bay district, he naturally hoped to be allowed to take a hand in the affair.

Captain Stanley had gone to Saltern two days after his appointment, but Dare and the captain's old retainer, Ben Saleby, had been left behind, Dare to finish his term at Bishop Field's College, and Ben to attend to the details involved in closing the captain's town house.

Now, however, both were on their way to join the captain.

Dare was an average youth, quick, intelligent, well set up. He had fair hair which lay close to his head and had a tendency to curl. His eyes were blue, the colour of those of most adventurers, and he wore for the most part a winning smile. That smile hovered about his lips as he sat in the smoke-room thinking of Saltern and the work ahead. Things promised well.

The blowing of the siren and the sudden realization that the ship was in smooth water roused him from his pleasant meditations. The ship was making harbour. A glimpse through the port-hole showed him a low point of land. He quickly donned his oilskin coat and went on deck. The ship was now in calm water sheltered by the land.

He went forward and watched the town slowly come into view. While he was eyeing it someone nudged his elbow. He turned round to face Ben.

"Hello, Ben!" he shouted, pleased. "Well, we're getting there."

"And about time too," Ben grumbled. "I've seen a windjammer work the coast quicker'n this one."

"What place is this? St. Lawrence?"

"Aye. Weren't you sure? But I fergot; you ain't been this way before."

"That's so. I say, Ben, there was a chap in the smoke-room spouting a lot of stuff about the smugglers in Saltern Bay. He said they were a tough lot. Looks as if there's warm work ahead."

"Reckon the cap'n kin be tough, too," said Ben with an odd touch of pride.

"You ought to know," laughed Dare.

Ben had sailed with Captain Stanley for years and had left the sea at the same time, though it must be admitted it had been with reluctance. Only his loyalty to the captain enabled him to make the break, for the change from bos'n of a ship to major-domo of a town house did not appeal to his deep-water tastes. The monotony of town life was relieved now and then, however, by

the captain's Revenue Service activities, for when there was work of a more than usually difficult character ahead, Ben's services were always impressed, to his great content.

"It's only an eight-hour run from here," said Dare.

"Ten on a day like this," declared Ben.

"I hope we'll be able to land," said Dare anxiously. "It's pretty rough."

"We'll lose this sea when we rounds into the Bay," Ben told him. "There's smooth water off Saltern. Never fear, we'll land all right."

"I hope so!" ejaculated Dare.

"I say, Ben," he added, a little later, "do you suppose it's true what that chap was saying about those Saltern fellows being the hardest lot going?"

"I don't disbelieve it," said the old sailor. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a black-bowled clay pipe of incredible age, and began to fill it dotingly. Dare remained silent while the rite was being performed, gazing the while on the grizzled veteran.

Ben was also "sixty if he was a day," but hard as nails yet. His face, tanned the colour of a barked sail, was battered and

ugly, but good nature lit it and made it human and friendly. His short stature, long arms, bowed legs, and slightly leaning-forward posture gave him the appearance of a gorilla; but there the resemblance ended, for under his hardened exterior he had the tender heart of a child.

"There's one of 'em in the steerage," he said when his pipe was drawing well.

"One of what?" asked Dare.

"One of them fellers from Saltern Bay."

"A smuggler?" exclaimed Dare, excited at the possibility.

"That's as may be. He hails from Tarnish. He told me a lot about the smugglin' game."

"Ah!"

"Aye, he knows a thing or two, he do. Know what he said?"

"No."

"He laughed when I asked if there warn't no way of stoppin' the smugglin', and said, 'Not while there's a oven in Saltern Bay,' said he.

"'And what eggsactly do you mean by that?' I asked him.

"'Oh,' he said, 'that's a riddle.'

"'But what might ovens which is meant for cookin' have to do with it, anyhow?' I asks again.

"He laughed a great laugh and he said, 'That's fer you to find out.'"

"Well?" demanded Dare eagerly, as Ben stopped. "What then?"

"Nothing," replied Ben. "That's all."

"It sounds meaningless to me," said Dare. "Do you suppose he was pulling your leg?"

"He might have been and yet he might not."

"You didn't tell him the business we're on?"

"Trust me," assured Ben dryly.

"Well, we can do little but guess about things yet. I expect father will have a few things to tell us when we see him."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Let's see. What time ought we to get there? Eight hours' run. It's two o'clock now. Allow an hour for delay here. We ought to do it by eleven o'clock."

"Aye, around midnight," said Ben.

CHAPTER II

FIRST BLOOD TO THE SMUGGLERS

AT half an hour after midnight, the *Glenbow* rounded Saltern Head and drawing in close to the land dropped her anchor about ten minutes' row from Saltern Quay. The wind had dropped, and the sea under the shelter of the land was quite calm. The town was hidden from sight in the darkness, which was more than ordinarily intense owing to the clouded sky and the lack of a moon. Ashore, the light on the quay blinked its warning, and two or three other late lights showed where the town lay asleep.

A raucous blast of the ship's siren woke echoes between the surrounding hills, but did not seemingly awake the people who lay sleeping between them. Dare, leaning eagerly over the rail with his gaze fixed shorewards, thought ruefully that such a sleepy town was not likely to yield much in the shape of adventure. He had not much time to dwell on that, however. Soon Ben, who had been collecting the luggage and seeing it safely

stowed in the boat, which had just been lowered, came up, and they both went to the ship's ladder. A few minutes later they were being rowed ashore.

As the boat shot between the quays jutting out from the harbour, Dare searched the blackness in vain for the gleam of a friendly light.

"Doesn't look as if father has come to meet us," he said to Ben. That worthy merely grunted.

The boat was rowed towards some steps at the foot of the quay on the town side, and they disembarked without further speech. Their luggage was taken out of the boat and placed on the quay by the boat's crew, which then went swinging off into the darkness, leaving Ben and Dare to make their way through the town as best they could.

"Here's a to-do," then grumbled Ben. "No one to meet us and it pitch dark and we not knowin' the road or the house."

"The best thing we can do is to follow the boat's crew," suggested Dare. "It's likely the post office is not far from the Customs."

They were, in fact, housed in the same building. Ben agreed, and picking their way as well as they could, they set off to follow the crew, with only the sound of the others' heavy tread to guide them.

They managed well enough until they came to a turning, and by that time the crew were so far ahead that neither Ben nor Dare could determine which way they had taken. In this somewhat absurd predicament they hesitated, Ben making use of the occasion as an opportunity to air his vocabulary. They were about to go straight ahead, when they saw a light approaching from the turning, and decided to accost whoever carried it. As the bearer of the light approached, they saw that it was a woman. Ben, taking the initiative, went to speak to her.

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am——" he began.

"I'm sure it's the first time you ever done it, Ben Saleby," came the tart interpolation.

"Why, it's Martha!" exclaimed Dare joyfully. Ben grunted.

Martha, the family servant for twenty years, and housekeeper since the death of Mrs. Stanley ten years before, had in the course of her duties married Ben, to that individual's never-ending surprise and astonishment. They got along very well together, however, having both the same interests—that is, the welfare of the Stanleys, and although Martha, by virtue of her

superior position and her longer length of service, was inclined to be tart with Ben now and then, Ben did not seem to mind it. He had been well disciplined on the quarter-deck, and it is to be supposed that he found something reminiscent of his sailing days in Martha's summary treatment of him at times.

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Derek," answered Martha. Dare's real name was Derek, but a tendency during early childhood to dare his acquaintances to dare him to attempt incredible exploits had earned him his nickname, which had in time ousted his real name from use by all except Martha, who was exceedingly rigid as regards the impropriety of misnaming those she served.

"And what might you be doing, Ben Saleby, talking to a female like this?"

"I was goin' to ask the way. We've lost our bearings," explained Ben. Martha sniffed.

"And how might you be, Martha?" Ben asked appeasingly.

"Well enough," said Martha shortly.

Ben nudged Dare's arm and said *sotto voce*, "In a temper."

"What's that?" demanded Martha, who was sharp of hearing.

"I was saying I hoped the cap'n was well and hearty," stated Ben mendaciously.

"Well, you can keep on hoping," returned Martha. "Your father is kept to the house, Mr. Derek," she explained. "He hurt his leg the other day, and can't use it very well yet. That's why he's not come to meet you."

Dare was concerned to hear this and said so.

"It's nothing serious," Martha hastened to assure him, and turned on Ben.

"Now then, Ben Saleby, pick up the baggage and don't keep us waiting here all night. This way, Mr. Derek," she directed, and the trio took the turning leading to the Customs House, where Captain Stanley was lodged.

They spoke little on the way. Martha was moody and out of sorts, and at that hour none of them had much relish for gossip. As they halted before a high-roofed building with lights showing below and above, Martha spoke, however.

"I might as well tell you both," she said brusquely, "that the captain got his bad leg from the smugglers."

Ben and Dare took this surprising information in different ways. Dare was speechless, but Ben, ever ready to fill such a breach, voiced several full-blooded oaths. Martha turned on him like a virago.

" Less of that, Ben Saleby, or I'll lay this lantern about your head. Yes, Mr. Derek, it's so. They set upon him two days ago when he was gallivanting goodness knows where. He's got a arm broke, too," she admitted.

Dare found speech at this. He knew Martha would make light of the affair, and he felt certain that his father was much worse than she had revealed. He turned on her impatiently, demanding to be admitted to the house and shown to his father's room ; and Martha, lifting the lantern high, straightway led him up the stairs to the captain's apartments.

Captain Stanley was in bed, but awake, to receive them. To Dare's relief there was little sign of serious illness to be seen in his father's face.

" What's this about being beaten up by the smugglers ? " Dare demanded affectionately when the first few embarrassed moments of their greeting were over.

As he lay in bed, all that could be seen of the captain was his head, but that was clear enough evidence of his character and former profession. The head was round, and the hair on it close cut ; the face full and red, the eyes blue and twinkling, the mouth

firm but able to relax in mellow moments, the chin square and dogged. A man whom you would like and trust on sight, one in whom you would readily confide, and to whom you would not hesitate to give responsibility.

He smiled at Dare as the latter lightly asked his question so as to hide his real feelings.

"So Martha told you," said the captain. "Yes, Dare, first blood to the smugglers, my boy."

"Hurt much?" asked Dare shyly. He had never witnessed his father helpless before.

"No, no," the captain was quick to say. "My arm's broken below the elbow, and my ankle's sprained a bit, but I'll be as well as ever in two weeks. In fact, I'm going to get up to-morrow, but I won't be able to move about, confound it. But sit down, sit down. And you there, Ben—come in."

Ben had been hanging about outside the door, and at the order he came rolling into the bedroom. He stopped at the foot of the bed and raised his hand in salute.

"Howdy-do, cap'n? Bad news, cap'n. In dock for repairs, I hears."

The captain nodded, still retaining his smile.

"Leakin' bad, cap'n?" queried Ben.

"Oh no," said the captain, and repeated the information he had given Dare concerning the extent of his injuries.

"It might be worse," said Ben, and added truculently, "I'd like to have a go at them fellers."

"And I too!" put in Dare, indignant at the treatment to which his father had been subjected. "How did it happen?"

"That's a long story," said the captain, "but I know you won't go to bed till you hear it, so make yourselves comfortable. Ben, sit down and take it easy while Martha makes you both something hot."

They obeyed, and Captain Stanley wrinkled his forehead in the effort of concentration as he prepared to accede to their wishes.

"In the first place, this is a much more difficult business than I expected," he began.

"Ah!" said Ben, leaning forward with eager interest.

"Yes. These chaps here are a crafty lot, and hard—hard as nails. It's my belief they won't stop at anything short of murder to prevent anyone spoiling their trade. And close! I've never met such closeness. I've been here nearly three weeks now, and

I haven't found out a fact that's of real importance, though I've discovered a few things that bear upon the case and reveal the extent of the difficulty we're up against.

"But I'd better begin at the beginning. The day after I landed I took over the office here. The tide-waiter was helpful but not very enthusiastic about my coming. In fact, the majority of the people seem to resent it. The merchants are the only men who are downright glad to see me. There's some resentment naturally at Johnson's being fired. He's lived here a long time and has his home here still. The truth of it is, of course, the majority of the people benefit by the smuggling, for it's not only liquor and tobacco that's smuggled, but commodities like sugar, luxuries (though in a smaller way) such as perfume, and much more extensive than that, the smuggling of gear. But the tobacco and liquor trade is the heaviest.

"This attitude of the townspeople—the place, by the way, is little more than a village—made things difficult for me from the start. Naturally I'd expected to extract a good deal of information from the people, but they won't talk. As for my predecessor in office, I couldn't very well,

in the nature of things, expect to learn much from him. He turned over the office to me and left me to work out my own salvation.

"The news of my coming travelled fast, of course, and no doubt the smugglers knew it before anyone else. I received a letter hinting at bribery before I'd been here a week, and when I didn't answer it I received another, threatening me and advising me to go back to St. John's, as Saltern wasn't a healthy place for busybodies. I didn't take any notice, of course. I've been threatened before. I kept on with my work.

"I hired a boat and sailed up and down the coast by day and night. I took long walks on the cliff-head when there was a chance of being unobserved. And last of all, I kept my ears well open, but for all I saw or discovered I might have saved myself the trouble. Nevertheless, I knew that all I had to do was to keep at it. Something was bound to turn up. Someone was sure to talk. Or the smugglers were sure to make a slip or to relax their vigilance some time or other.

"The smugglers and the villagers probably realized this as much as I did, and in the

first ten days I was here I became the most unpopular man in the district. They'd all found out by that time that I wasn't to be bribed or frightened off by threatening letters. So they changed their tactics and commenced an offensive. I found myself being deliberately hindered in my work. My boat's gear was stolen and when afterwards I kept the new gear locked up, they sunk the boat at her moorings. The windows of the house here were broken late one night—pure hooliganism, that—and the man who was helping me work the boat gave up the job. And I found I couldn't get another, though I offered big money. Those who would have liked to take the money were afraid. The gang here really dominates the district. They're not outlaws, but they're very nearly becoming so. Of course, there's no police force. A sleepy fat old constable keeps the peace, but he's practically useless except to settle domestic quarrels and to fine people for keeping dogs without a licence.

" I had to deal with the hooliganism alone, but all I could do was to lodge a complaint and guard against similar trouble in future. For a while I was successful. Then I was caught, not off my guard, but in a defenceless position, without a weapon except a

heavy walking-stick, for I don't believe in carrying a revolver."

A knock at the door interrupted the narrative at this point, and Martha came in bearing three steaming bowls of chocolate and a plate of sandwiches. She refused to leave the room until the chocolate had been drunk and the sandwiches eaten.

When Martha, satisfied, finally left the room the captain took up the thread of his story.

"By one thing and another I had my attention turned from the coast to what is known as the Spaleen road. This is a cross-country road linking Saltern to Spaleen, and running beyond Saltern to Shagtown, Tarnish, etc., farther round the Bay. It seemed to me there was a great deal of traffic on this road between Spaleen and Saltern. I knew, of course, that the people used it a great deal for the purpose of farming small patches of land in the district, and to cart fire-wood from the hills. But that did not seem to me to account for the large amount of traffic.

"I made up my mind I'd keep a closer watch on it. One day I took up a stand on a small hill overlooking the road three miles from the town, and with the aid of a pair of

binoculars spied on all who passed. And I had a piece of luck; for I'd not been there an hour when I saw two horse-drawn carts meet and stop. The men driving them engaged in conversation, and I actually saw a bottle which I dare say contained whiskey change hands, and also a package which looked suspiciously like a box of tobacco.

"Of course, that was a very slight exchange, and I might easily have been mistaken in the articles passed, but I didn't think so then, and later something occurred which proved, or at least made me feel certain, that I was right.

"I began to puzzle out where the traffic had its head. Spaleen, I thought, was too far away to be considered practicable, seeing that the smugglers could have their cache so much nearer Saltern and the centre of Saltern Bay. I decided to examine a road map before I made any further investigations, and returned to town.

"That same day I located a road map in the office and discovered what I might have expected, that the Spaleen road was a devious one, and at two points it approached to within a few miles of the coast between Spaleen and Saltern.

"One of the points was near Spaleen, the

other in the neighbourhood of Saltern. I fixed upon the latter as being relative to my suspicions. I suspected the smugglers of having a cache somewhere on the coast near Saltern and that the back-door of this cache gave upon the Spaleen road, which could be made to serve admirably the needs of distribution, as there was a great deal of traffic on it daily and movement of any kind would not be liable to excite the curiosity and suspicion of those who, either by nature of their profession or their sympathies, were antipathetic to the trade.

"The thing I had to do was to prove my suspicion well founded. But the trouble was, how? It's harder to escape observation on a country road than in a city street. I couldn't very well go in the daytime without my every movement being watched. And it was little use looking for a track to the coast on a dark night—and the nights have been particularly dark lately. The only thing to do was to compromise, and set out at dawn when there were few people stirring. And that's what I did.

"Well, to cut a long story short, I was about four miles from the town and passing a wood when a gang sprang up from nowhere, and jumping on me from behind had me at

their mercy before I could strike a blow or even turn upon them.

"They didn't trouble to tie me up but hit out with their boots, and one of them lay about him with a heavy stick. I thought they were going to finish me, but just before I lost my senses I heard one of them shout: 'Don't kill him; Payter said only make him wish he was dead!'"

Both Dare and Ben broke out into indignant speech at hearing this, then allowed the captain to finish.

"They dumped me in a bush a gunshot from the road. That's where I was when I came to. I would have been pretty badly situated, for I couldn't walk, if a passing countryman hadn't heard my shouts for help and taken me to Saltern in his cart.

"I sent for the doctor, feeling pretty bad. Apart from my arm, and a twisted ankle, a great number of bruises and two cuts on the head, I was in excellent condition, he told me ironically, and sent me to bed. And here I am."

Dare and Ben, who had hitherto restrained their feelings, now broke into excited comment.

"Of all the dirty, underhand, mean ways of fighting!" exclaimed Dare.

"Did you know any of them, cap'n?"

asked Ben, who had for a few minutes relapsed into the language of the fo'c'sle without rebuke.

"No," replied the captain, "I didn't recognize their voices and I didn't see their faces. As I've said, they came on me from behind. And when I did glimpse their faces I was too dazed and stunned to see them clearly. All I discovered was that Payter didn't want me killed, though who Payter is I don't know. I've never heard the name mentioned here."

"He might be the leader of the gang," suggested Dare.

"I've thought so myself," said his father.

"There was no doubtin' but that 'twas the smugglers who bate you, cap'n?" asked Ben.

"Who else would it be?" returned the captain.

"Aye, who?" agreed Ben.

Further discussion that night, or rather that morning, was then resolutely forbidden by Captain Stanley.

"It's time you both turned in," he declared. "We'll talk again later in the day. Now, away with you!"

Obeying orders, they both left the room and retired for a much-needed rest.

CHAPTER III

BEN HAS A BRAIN-WAVE

"WHAT are you going to do about it, father?"

It was ten o'clock the same day. The captain had carried out his threat to get up and was reclining in an easy chair with his lame leg resting on a footstool. Dare was squatting on the floor beside him, and Ben, whom Martha had driven out of the kitchen, was hanging about in the background in the manner of a faithful watch-dog. At Dare's question he pricked up his ears and waited for the captain's answer.

"I suppose you mean, what am I going to do about this assault?" the captain counter-questioned.

Dare nodded.

"Well," said his father, "as a matter of fact I'm not going to do anything—not at present. I could call in reserves, but I'm not going to. I'm going to work this thing out myself. And, mind you, although I'm not a boasting man, I'm going to make

someone pay heavily for that licking I got."

"That's the talk," approved Dare. "And as to reserves, why, you've got Ben and myself."

"And very good reserves too," said the captain, his eyes twinkling, "but I don't think I can use them at present."

"You'll be givin' us a rayson, cap'n, no doubt," said Ben, while Dare checked his disappointment as it was about to find expression.

"Yes, Ben, I will," said the captain affably. "To be frank, at present there's absolutely nothing we can do in Saltern. Those chaps are too much on their guard. We've got to play a waiting game. We must wait, as I said before, until somebody talks or the smugglers make a slip. Meanwhile, about all we can do at the moment is to prevent stuff coming in openly, as I'm assured it did in Johnson's time."

"But why can't Ben and I go on with the work where you dropped it?" protested Dare. "I'm a good wood scout if I do say it myself, and Ben can smell a whiskey bottle a mile away, as you know."

"Agreed," said the captain. "But I'm not going to have you two get a dose of the

medicine they gave me. And that's all that would happen if you attempted to play my game at present. It's useless, as I've said. You wouldn't be a mile along the Spaleen road before every smuggler in the district would know you were coming. I could, as I've said, call up enough reserves to search the woods and the cliff-head adequately. But I don't want to do that. The time for reserves is when we've discovered the cache ourselves, and can plan a coup that will catch the beggars red-handed.

"No, the thing to do is to play at patience. I've got two weeks or more of enforced leisure in which to think out a plan, and I promise you that at the end of that time things will begin to happen."

"Two weeks!" exclaimed Dare ruefully.

"It may seem a long time to wait for action, but it will soon pass," consoled the captain.

"Cap'n," said Ben, who had been making heavy work at thinking, "there's more than one place to find out things."

"What exactly do you mean, Ben?"

"Well, now, ain't it a fact that all the liquor and things comes from St. Pierre?"

"Certainly."

"Well, cap'n, if you was to ask me I'd say the St. Pierre end was a good place to pick up a little smuggling news on the quiet."

Captain Stanley considered the idea.

"Ben," he said at last, "you're right. There's something in that."

"Aye," said Ben, greatly gratified. "Men will talk, cap'n, especially when havin' taken drink, and where would they be as free in their ways and speech as in a place that's outside the laws of the country they're robbin'?"

Dare, who knew when to listen, did so now.

"Certainly something might come of that," said Captain Stanley, now frankly interested in the action Ben had suggested. "Of course, I shall have to send someone not known to the Saltern people or the smugglers. Now who is there I can give the job to?"

"There's me, cap'n," said Ben modestly.

"There's no one I'd rather send, Ben, but all Saltern will know who you are as soon as you put your head out of doors."

"And what if I don't put it out?" asked Ben.

The captain did not answer.

"Did you meet anyone when you came ashore last night?" he asked instead.

"Nary a one," declared Ben, "except Martha."

"And I've said nothing to anyone about your coming. There's no one in my confidence here. Who came ashore with you?"

"No one but the boat's crew with the mail-bags."

"They may have talked."

"Who to, cap'n?"

"Well, the postmistress."

"Send Martha to find out, cap'n. If there's news of that kind ready to the postmistress's tongue she's not likely to hide it."

"I'll do it. Ask Martha to come here."

Ben left the room and a few moments later returned, preceded by the housekeeper. The captain explained clearly what he wanted her to do.

"Go down for my letters, Martha, and engage the postmistress in gossip. Find out if she knows anything about Ben and Dare having arrived last night. Don't put a leading question. But there, you'll know well enough how to set about it. You haven't spoken to anyone yourself about their coming here, have you, Martha?"

"Not me, sir. There's no one here I'd want to talk to about your affairs—or my own."

"Good woman. Well, we want to keep their presence here a secret if it's not already known."

Martha left on her errand, and Ben, enthused at the prospect of action, paced up and down the room as though he were on watch at sea once again.

"If there's no one the wiser for my being here, you'll send me, cap'n?"

"Certainly, Ben."

"And what about me, father?" demanded Dare excitedly, breaking into speech at last.

"It's not a job I care for you to go on, Dare."

"Oh come, now, is that fair? I don't want to blow my own horn, but didn't I come in handy on that last job?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, sir, why not give me the benefit of the doubt in this case?"

"I'm not suggesting you wouldn't be useful, my boy, but I'm afraid of your running too many risks. St. Pierre can be a rough spot at times."

"But Ben would be there."

"Ben would be there, certainly, but you know yourself that you're not likely to be restrained much by Ben's presence."

"That's not saying much for my discretion," said Dare ruefully.

"Well, to be frank, Dare, you are inclined to be over-impulsive, you know. It's a good fault—on the right side. But it might lead to serious consequences on a spying-out-the-land job like this."

Dare jumped to his feet.

"Look here, sir," he said, "I swear if you'll only let me go that I'll take my orders from Ben like I would from you. I won't do a thing that he forbids me to do. Word of honour, sir."

"Well, you seem very keen, Dare, and I'm sure you mean what you say, but even so I can't promise."

"But it's not dangerous work, sir!"

"Not if the men sent know their business. I can trust Ben to be in character—he's never anything else. No one would ever suspect him of being an amateur detective. But if you went with him, you with your soft hands, your educated speech, how would you explain your relation to him? Ben has to pretend he's a fisherman. But that will make your presence seem an incongruity, for you don't look like a fisherman and I don't think you ever will."

"Beggin' your pardon, cap'n, but I think that's easier nor what you make out," said Ben, who was obviously on Dare's side.

"He could go as my nevvy, the only child of my niece who married a clerk in St. John's, who give the boy a good eddication afore he died, and who, leavin' him without a penny, his mother bein' already dead, he was forced to come to me to earn his living, he bein' without friends or pull of any kind, and me bein' glad to have him."

The captain's face twisted amusedly at the construction and the content of Ben's unusually long speech.

"I didn't know you had so much imagination, Ben. It's sound enough, of course, what you say, and as I've said already, there's very little danger in the job if you go about it rightly, as I've no doubt you will."

"Then you'll let me go, father?" demanded Dare eagerly.

"Perhaps. We'll see what Martha says first."

Martha came back with the information that so far as she could discover no one in Saltern excepting themselves knew of Dare and Ben's presence.

"Then that settles it," declared the captain. "You'll continue to keep under cover, Ben, and you also, Dare. If you give me your word not to rush your fences, as

the hunting men say, you can go with Ben."

"I'll promise that quick enough," said Dare, overjoyed. "It's awfully good of you, father."

"Well, that's arranged then. I'm not sure you'll accomplish much, but certainly nothing can be lost by trying. Now, as to plans——

"There's one thing certain; you can't start from here. People would be too curious. Besides, you've got to keep out of their sight. You must go to Shagtown—stay here to-day and to-night, and early to-morrow morning slip out of the house before people are stirring. It's a four-mile jaunt to Shagtown, but you won't mind that, especially as you're travelling light.

"At Shagtown, which is somewhat larger than Saltern, you'll not attract much notice. You can tell them you're baymen come to buy a boat. And that, in fact, will be the truth, for that's the first thing you must do. I advise you to buy a stout, decked boat. Ben knows the type I mean. They're much used by the fishermen here. Commission her and leave Shagtown the next day. I don't want you to make the trip to St. Pierre at night, though it is only a matter of

twenty-five miles. Ben can find his way there easily enough. We've harboured often at St. Pierre in the old days.

"Don't run up too many expenses, even though the Government is footing the bill. And you're to telegraph me every four or five days 'O.K.,' so that I'll know you're all right. Don't sign it. I give you two weeks. At the end of that time I'll expect you to return whether you've been successful or not."

Dare and Ben listened closely to every word that fell from the captain's lips, nodding repeatedly in agreement and understanding.

"Have Martha pack two of Ben's old dunnage bags, one for each of you. And you, Dare, get out your very oldest and roughest clothes, roughen up your hands a bit and don't wash your face too often. By the time you get to St. Pierre you'll be more in character, though as Ben's 'eddicated' nephew there's not much for you to assume in that way.

"When you get to St. Pierre, Ben, you can talk a bit about your own smuggling propensities. But there, I leave that part of your programme to you. No doubt it will be dictated by what you find happening on the spot."

The rest of that day and the early night was given up to considering ways and means. Both Ben and Dare entered into the adventure in optimistic spirit. The captain, while not so sanguine of their success, was inclined to be enthusiastic about the project. Martha was the only one to disapprove of it. But Captain Stanley won her over with a few phrases, repeatedly assuring her that there was no danger and that the outing could be looked upon in the nature of a holiday.

At three o'clock the next morning, Dare and Ben slipped unnoticed out of the house, the captain's guarded " Good luck ! " sounding in their ears.

They took to the Shagtown road with a will, striking into a walk that would bring them to the town in an hour or so. They reached it without having met a single person, and made at once for the quay. They had in a knapsack a plentiful supply of food, and on reaching the quay they chose a snug corner and prepared to eat while waiting for the town to awake.

There was a good deal of shipping in the harbour, from imposing three-masted ships to fishermen's boats such as they themselves intended to acquire. One of the latter lay

by the quay near them, and, at the sight of smoke issuing from the small fo'c'sle, Ben suggested asking the owner for something hot to drink, as the morning was a raw and chilly one.

Dare agreeing, they gave the boat a hail, and in response a shutter was pulled back and a bearded, good-natured face appeared.

"Good mornin' to you," said Ben.

"And to you," said the man, eyeing them in a friendly manner.

"We was wonderin' if you was boilin' the kettle and if we could get a drap of tay. We've the money to pay."

"As to your money," said the man, "I want none of it. But you're welcome to take a drap of tay. Come aboard."

They proceeded quickly to accept the invitation, and leaving their bags on deck were soon sitting down in the cramped but otherwise comfortable fo'c'sle. In return for the tea they shared their food, which Martha had put up with a liberal hand. When all three had partaken freely, the two older men exchanged tobacco pouches and prepared to gossip, while Dare, to whom the unusual environment was keenly stimulating, stretched himself out and prepared to listen.

"You're up early on the go," said the boat's master.

"Aye," said Ben. "To tell the truth we got to the town too late, or too early you might say, to take a bed, and was waitin' for sun-up."

"No sun to-day," said the fisherman with a glance up through the companion-way at the grey sky, across which swift clouds were moving. "The wind's from the east."

"So 'tis," agreed Ben, who was very pleased with his surroundings.

"You'll not be Saltern men, I reckon," said the fisherman.

"No," replied Ben warily, "we comes from beyant Spaleen. Name of Wheeler. This here boy is me nevvy. We come to Shagtown to buy a boat."

"And wouldn't you be finding one in Saltern, then?"

"The Saltern boats is not to our likin'. We heard tell that Shagtown is a good place fer boats Barmitage Bay built."

"So 'tis," admitted their host. "This boat of mine is one of 'em."

"I knowed as much from her lines," said Ben. "A good boat, I reckon."

"Aye, good enough," returned the other, then added with some pride: "She can do

eight knots in a breeze and you don't have to take in sail until it's too bad weather for any Christian to be out. But she's a little small for my needs."

"Say you so? 'Tis one like her we're lookin' for. She's not too big an' she's got the speed. If you can put us next to one we'd be obleeged."

"Ah, that's easier said nor done," declared the fisherman. He eyed Ben with more interest than hitherto. "You was goin' to pay cash, I doubt?" he said.

"We was," stated Ben; and, his attention caught by something calculating in the other's look, he added: "It'd be the great luck to find a one like this. You wouldn't be sellin' her for a penny, I bet."

"No," replied the man, "but I'm not sure I wouldn't be sellin' her for the right price."

"Ah!"

"She's worth seventy-five dollars the way she stands now."

"A nice price," said Ben. "We was goin' to give sixty, weren't we, nevvy?"

"Sixty," agreed Dare solemnly.

The fisherman seemed to lose all interest in the conversation. He was silent for some minutes, then as though it were no matter of great concern, he said:

" You'd want her fer fishin', I s'pose ? "

" Well, in a way," admitted Ben. Then, as though revealing something of importance, he added : " We was thinkin' of runnin' to St. Pierre now and then."

The fisherman nodded sagely in a manner that showed he understood.

" Was you, now ? Tobaccy is a big price, 'tis true."

" And so is sugar and whiskey and gear," said Ben.

Quite satisfied now of the character of his guests, the other said : " But they're cheaper in St. Pierre."

Ben nodded. " That's so."

" Eighty dollars, was it, I said I'd take for her ? "

" Seventy-five. But we mentioned we was going to give sixty for one if we found her."

" Ah, was it so ? 'Tis a pity, but no doubt you'll find one to suit you."

" Aye, no doubt. There's a man I knows here who is well knowledged in boats."

" I'm not sayin' I wouldn't take seventy, mind you," said the fisherman.

" Would you, now ? Sixty-five is our limit, ain't it, nevvy ? "

" We wouldn't go above sixty-five," agreed Dare.

"Cash, I think you said?" put in the fisherman.

"Cash," repeated Ben and Dare in chorus.

"Then if you're agreeable, we'll make a bargain."

Delighted more than he could say by this opportune offer, Ben stated his willingness and the two immediately put their heads together.

"You can take her over right now," said the fisherman, "if you likes to pay a extry five dollars fer the cookin' gear and stove. The dory, of course, goes with her."

Ben was agreeable. By taking over the boat practically ready for sea, they would save time and money. He suggested that they should go ashore when the bank opened, and sign the necessary papers in the presence of witnesses. And this they did, leaving Dare in charge.

By ten o'clock Ben was the owner of the boat and was in possession. And by noon they had provisioned her and made her ready for sea. Before taking leave of them the fisherman wished them good luck, and advised them when they went to St. Pierre to trade at Giraud's. "You can't do better," he told them.

At this time the wind was blowing a good

steady breeze from the east, which meant a fair wind for St. Pierre, and Ben, who had examined the sky closely, was inclined to put to sea immediately.

"We've done the business of buyin' a boat much quicker'n the cap'n expected," he said to Dare. "If we can work out of the harbour, and I think we can, though the wind's blowin' in a bit, we could make the run to St. Pierre in three hours. The weather's clear and there's no sign of worse to come. What do you say, Mr. Dare?"

"The quicker the better," replied Dare; "to-morrow the weather may not be so good."

"Then get ready, and put on your oil-skins, for it'll be wet outside."

Dare obeyed and in half an hour the boat, named the *Nancy*, cast off.

CHAPTER IV

AT ST. PIERRE

THEY had difficulty in working the boat out of the harbour, but under reduced sail and Ben's expert handling they eventually managed it.

Once they were far enough off the land to clear Shagtown Cape they had straight sailing, and shaking out the reef in the big foresail they settled down to the short voyage. They passed Saltern a mile from the land, which was skirted by the white foam of breaking seas.

The boat gave an admirable exhibition of her qualities and proved her late owner's boast correct, for with a fair wind and a following sea she did her eight knots in grand style.

Dare and Ben had an opportunity to observe the Saltern coast, and found it wild and rugged. Cliffs ranging from two hundred to four hundred feet in height rose uncompromisingly upright from the sea, but were broken at points by intersecting small sandy

beaches which gave upon less precipitous backgrounds.

Except for a solitary merchantman beating her way towards Shagtown, they had the sea to themselves, for the weather was too rough for the local fishermen to go to their trawls and nets.

Ben gave Dare the tiller of the *Nancy* and turned a pair of binoculars on the Saltern cliffs, subjecting them to a long, close scrutiny. Except for a few sheep and goats, and a fisherman's cottage or so in lonely, desolate-looking spots, there was no sign of life or human habitation. A rugged, solitary coast it certainly was.

Further from Saltern, however, the coast became more pleasing to the eye, and sloped down more gradually to the sea. Ben, at this point, took the tiller again and changed the course a little. Miquelon, the companion island of St. Pierre, could be plainly seen, as could Green Island, and setting his course by the latter Ben turned the boat's head definitely from the land. This necessitated taking in some sheet and subjected the boat to a rough beam sea. She was, fortunately, in good ballast, and had little to fear from the press of wind bearing her down heavily as she sank into the hollows. Dare, who

was with Ben in the cockpit, the deck at a level with their waists, welcomed the rough water. The sting of the spray, the roar of the wind, stimulated him to a high degree, and enjoyment swallowed up any concern there might have been as to their safety.

Ben, chewing with gusto a plug of tobacco, was in his natural element. He had not enjoyed himself so much for years. Now and then he gave a grunt of approval as the boat rose gallantly from under a breaking sea, but for the most part he was stoically inexpressive, his gaze fixed ever ahead, his capable hand hard set on the tiller.

At four o'clock they brought open the roadstead of St. Pierre harbour, and half an hour later, in half a gale of wind and a blinding rainstorm, they made the inner harbour.

Considerably elated at their successful run, they headed the boat towards the public quay next Treloar's wharf, and in calm water tied her up and made her shipshape for the night.

"Four hours an' a half from one quay to t'other," said Ben in high good humour. "Now we'll go below and put the kettle on and have a cup o' tea."

It was snug and cosy in the little fo'c'sle and Dare, stripped of his oilskins, listened with growing pleasure in his environment to the wail of the wind, the beat of the rain, and the uneasy chafing of the boat and the shipping in her vicinity as the wind streamed through their rigging.

Now and then there sounded a long warning note from a siren, a dog would bark, and a solitary cart rattle by on the cobble-stoned quay.

A stormy night, Ben prophesied, but as they were snug in harbour they could ignore the weather. Ben, like the seasoned campaigner he was, went about the business of boiling the kettle, and in a short time he had fashioned a delectable meal consisting of a roasted piece of cod fish, cold ham, pickles, bread, butter, jam, and tea, all tasting a little of smoke and the tang of salt water.

Dare, as he consumed prodigious quantities of this fare, felt he had never supped better in his life. After the meal was finished he made himself useful and washed up. Ben filled his pipe and took his pleasure of it. His work done, Dare stretched out on a blanket. For awhile both he and Ben maintained a strict silence, listening to the steady drip of the rain on deck.

"We won't telegraph the cap'n till tomorrer," Ben said at last. "He won't be expectin' us to get here before then. As it's a dirty night and'll be dark early, we won't go ashore now but take our comfort here."

Dare, lying on his back, his head supported by his clasped hands, nodded contentedly. St. Pierre was lying waiting for him. He could afford to be patient. There would be all the joy of discovery in watching the town awake next morning.

"Ah, these is good times, Mr. Dare," said Ben after another silence. "It does my heart good to be lyin' here like this. Many's the time I've laid me down to sleep to the sound of wind and water, and woke to hear the cry of the watch, and the sound of the waves striking like a steel hammer on the deck overhead. And other nights there was when I took me blankets on deck and laid me down under the stars, with the sea that smooth you could frame it like a picture with the horizon, and the air that warm an' soft you would be thinkin' you was in the tropics, instead of in the Western Ocean not two days sail from the Azores."

Dare nodded dreamily, Ben's voice like distant music in his ears. What boy has not had his imagination sent rioting by thinking

of such things? A fine life, a clean life, a brave life, that of the sailor, with strange ports always lying ahead, and the sea, the vast sea always about one, bringing calm and storm, monotony and drama and adventure.

He slept that night the sleep of eager youth and dreamed rosy dreams of the things he should do some fine day when he came into his kingdom—that delectable world which lies before youth when it attains the age of manhood and emancipation, that bright, that chivalrous age of twenty-one.

Early the next morning he was roused by Ben's shout of "show a leg!" He tumbled out eagerly. Ben had already kindled a fire. He shoved his head above deck and saw the town wrapt in a morning mist, and on the waters of the harbour the dimly seen hulls of the ships.

There was a nip in the air that drove sleep and dreams from him and made him keen to launch forth into action and adventure. He went on deck, and drawing up a bucket of water plunged his head deep into it. His toilet was soon made. He grinned as he remembered that for the first time in his life he had an adequate excuse for not scrubbing his face. When he had finished he went to the fo'c'sle head and called down to Ben.

" Brekfus is not ready yet," Ben told him. " As you're up there you might as well wash down the deck and take a turn at the pump."

While he was doing this the mist rolled away and the sun appeared as if by magic, gilding the town and the shipping with early morning beauty.

The boat was too far below the quay for him to see anything but the upper stories of the buildings facing the harbour, so he had to content himself with gazing upon the latter and the variegated shipping that filled it. Steam trawlers, coal tramps, American deep-water fishermen, Newfoundland Bank fishermen, cargo boats, sailing and steam yachts, steam tugs and a host of smaller craft filled the basin.

He gazed on this scene as he had so often gazed on St. John's harbour as seen from the college windows, admiring the beautiful lines of some of the vessels, the ugliness of others, indeed their endless variety.

He was torn from this pleasant exercise by the call to breakfast. After the meal was over they loosened the sails and shook them out to dry, then prepared to go ashore. By this time the town was well awake. At a neighbouring quay one vessel was discharging coal and another produce, both of which

commodities were being loaded on to antiquated ox-carts drawn by even more antiquated oxen. Numerous dogs were barking and pretending to be fiercely excited by pieces of stick floating in the water, and one after another were diving off the quay, encouraged by errant bakers' boys and other seemingly unattached youths.

The sound of strange speech struck the ear, a French that Dare could hardly believe was the same language he was taught at school.

In time they prepared to enter this strange world. Ben locked up the fo'c'sle, asked the crew of a nearby boat to keep an eye on the *Nancy*, then, followed by Dare, climbed up the side of the quay and stood erect on dry land.

The town of St. Pierre has been formed by the needs of the visiting sailors and fishermen of France, America, and Newfoundland. Old as age goes in the Americas, the remains of the English fortifications can still be seen, but now by the Treaty of Utrecht, no garrisoning or fortification of the island is permitted. Its architecture is such as one finds in the seaports of Brittany and sea towns such as Marseilles. There has been a rich trade done there in its day, but its import-

ance has declined with the importance of St. Pierre et Miquelon as a colony, the only French colony in the Atlantic, and little more in reality than a station for her Bank fishermen.

But enough remains of the colony's importance to ensure a brisk trade in the summer months when the population is greatly augmented by the visiting fleets.

The principal street is known as the waterfront. It runs parallel to the quays and is flanked by numerous cafés, shops, and marine stores.

Breaking it about half-way is a large square with a decrepit fountain and an uneven, cobble-stoned pavement. It was into this square that Ben and Dare stepped on their first visit ashore.

Ben, faced by several routes, stopped to consider his movements.

"We can't do better than walk a little way along the waterfront, and drop in on Madame Roquierre," he said. "It's a little early for the cafés, but madame is always on hand night and day."

Dare, to whom even the name of Madame Roquierre was unfamiliar, nodded agreement, and they sauntered on their way. The waterfront presented a very animated scene.

Scores of sailors strolled up and down, proprietors of *magasins* and cafés stood outside their premises exchanging salutations with the passers-by and not omitting to call attention to the exclusive benefits patronage of themselves would bring, teams of oxen plodded slowly by, and gendarmes strolled on their rounds, keeping a vigilant eye on one and all.

Ben had little eyes for so familiar a scene, but to Dare every detail was foreign to anything in his previous experience and therefore worthy of interest and attention.

They eventually reached Madame Roquierre's café, a large square box of a building with a prevailing atmosphere of sour wine inside and out. The bar was empty except for an old manservant busy raising a cloud of dust. In response to Ben's inquiries after madame, he answered, " Elle est sortie."

Dare recognized the phrase and translated it for Ben's benefit.

" Out, is she ? " said Ben. " Well, it's no matter ; we can come back again." They returned to the waterfront.

" The madame," explained Ben, " is a wise old bird. She knows everyone and everything in St. Pierre. She's kept that there grog-

shop of hers for forty years and more. Although it's ten years since I've been here, I'm willin' to bet she can remember me. Aye, that's so. You might think I wouldn't want to be remembered as a bos'n of the cap'n's. But you'd be wrong. Madame ain't the one to blab, and when I tells her that I'm named Wheeler an' that I wants everybody who knows me to forget they've seen me before, she'll catch on as quick as anything. Nothin' can't surprise her. She's seen too much in her time. I'm countin' to hear a bit from her about this end of the smuggling game. And maybe she'll be able to give us a few names. We'll go to her fer our dinner and supper—she keeps a good kitchen, as I knows of old. It ain't convenient to eat aboard all the time."

Dare welcomed this plan and said so, it being likely to offer them diversion as well as benefit their mission.

They spent the morning sauntering from quay to quay in the manner of others of their kind. Now and then they were drawn into conversation, and on such occasions responded genially and with that seeming openness most likely to inspire confidences. At noon they went to the telegraph office and cabled the captain. They then returned

to the quay and had a look at the boat. Then they wended their way once more towards Madame Roquierre's.

All was changed now. The bar was fairly crowded, and through the swing door leading to the kitchen came a delectable odour, and a burst of sound comparable to that attendant upon the feeding of a battalion.

Ben pushed through the crowd at the bar, Dare in his wake, and went into the kitchen. There, presiding over the distribution of an enormous tureen of soup, was Madame Roquierre. She was stout, possessed a heavy moustache, and very white teeth which were often revealed in an excess of geniality. She found time, amidst her other duties, to greet everyone who entered, and Dare and Ben were no exceptions. Ben called out a "bonjoor, madame," while Dare silently gave an imitation of a bow.

They took seats at a long table already well filled, and as soon as they were seated immense bowls of soup were placed before them. The soup seemed to Dare to contain nearly every known vegetable, but decidedly it was good. Ben attacked it with gusto, and before long Dare was following his example.

"Never anything else here in the kitchen but soup," said Ben. "If you want other

things they're special. But after a bowl or two of this you don't want much. I come here because it would look funny our askin' fer a private room. We're not of that sort now. But later I'll have a talk with madame and we can have what we like here in the kitchen."

After the soup they ordered coffee, and sat so long over it that the room was practically empty when they rose to go. Before they could reach the door, madame confronted them.

"Bonjour, messieurs," she said genially. "Ah, I have seen you before, my fren'," she said to Ben, and wrinkled her forehead in an effort to remember. "So! It was with the capitaine——"

"No names, madame, if you please," interrupted Ben. "I'd take it as a favour if you'd fergit you've seen me before."

"Hein? Ah, so, I see! Eh bien, it is as you say. You stay long?"

"Two weeks, perhaps. Perhaps less."

"So! It is well. You shall come to see me again, is it not?"

"We was thinkin' of takin' dinner and supper here, madame."

"Good," declared madame. "But stay, you will drink a brandy?"

Ben, who looked upon the offer of hospitality as most favourable to his intentions, accepted.

"And you, m'sieu?" said madame, turning to Dare.

"Nothing, thank you," replied Dare.

"But a sirop," insisted madame, "a bon sirop." And Dare perforce could do no other than accept.

They seated themselves again at a table and madame, who was inclined to gossip, joined them.

"It is long, I think, since you came last," she said to Ben.

"Aye, madame, ten years."

"Ma foi! How the time it goes! And you sail no more with the capitaine who shall not be named?"

"That's so. I got a boat of me own, madame. Me and me nevvy here, we intends to run between St. Pierre and the mainland. Tobaccy is dear on the mainland. Savvy?"

Madame smiled wisely.

"There is light," she answered. "So, you also, hein? Well, and why not? The poor should not have to pay taxes."

"You said it, madame."

"Tobacco, you have said. And wine, yes?"

" Liquor, madame, is like tobaccy. If you got to have it, get it cheap."

" So you are wise. Now I—— Well, my fren', I have a large cellar. Vous comprenez ? And you shall do as well by me as at that ol' thief Giraud's, who boasts he has all the trade of such as yourself."

"I've heard of Giraud," said Ben cautiously.

" A thief, my fren'. I have said it. And it is not true that he has all the trade, for, mark you, I, Roquierre, say it—Pierre has taken from me no less than one mille of the three-cross brandy since two years."

" And who might Pierre be, madame ? " Ben made the mistake of inquiring.

Madame's expression changed the slightest bit. A curtain of reserve slowly descended.

" You know not Pierre ? " she asked, a little surprised.

" Never heard of him," admitted Ben. " A smuggler, is he ? "

Madame rose to her feet, smiling enigmatically.

" A smuggler ? " she said. " But what is that ? Here we name not such things. If one wishes to take a bottle or two quietly, ma foi, is he then to be called a smuggler ? "

" What else, madame ? "

" It makes nothing," madame quietly

answered. " We talk of other things, n'est-ce pas ? "

" But this Pierre feller ? " insisted Ben stupidly.

Madame eyed him for a moment, then leaned forward impressively.

" Understand, m'sieu, one does not talk lightly of Pierre to those who know him not. So, enough. I have already said too much. Au'voir, messieurs. You are welcome always, and forget not what I have said of Giraud."

She gave them a guarded smile and left the room. Ben watched her go without a word, then, beckoning to Dare to follow, made for the street.

" Well, we didn't get much forrarder there," he exclaimed ruefully, as he stood in the street outside.

" You went about it in the wrong way," said Dare impatiently. " If you hadn't asked her who Pierre was, she would have been telling you all about him in a few minutes."

" Aye, I reckon that's so," agreed Ben, abashed. " What a dunderhead I be ! Why didn't you stop me, Mr. Dare ? "

" I didn't have a chance. Madame, as you've said, is a wise old lady," he added. " She thought it was queer your not knowing

Pierre if you were a smuggler. Pierre, who took no less than a thousand cases of brandy from her in two years!"

"Aye, I reckon it seemed funny," said Ben humbly. "But anyhow, we got somethin' to go by, we can keep a look-out for that feller Pierre."

"That's so, of course. He must be a smuggler in a pretty big way, don't you think?"

"There's no tellin', but it seems so. A thousand of brandy from one cellar in two years is not bad work, not to mention what he might have had from Giraud."

"Of course, he may be running cargoes down the coast, and not in Saltern Bay at all."

"That's what we've got to find out. One of the first things we got to do is see Giraud."

"We might go up there later in the afternoon."

"Aye. And to-night I'll try and get on the right side of madame again. I don't believe she thinks I'm not what I give myself out to be."

"No," agreed Dare. "But you'll have to go carefully there. It's my belief it's no use trying to pump her now. She'll be on her guard. Still, it won't hurt to quieten down her suspicions if she has any."

" You said it."

In a few minutes they had reached the quay. The *Nancy* was lying almost level with it on a flood tide.

" What shall we do now ? " asked Dare.

" I was thinkin' of takin' a nap," confessed Ben. " There's no use tryin' to see that feller Giraud till three o'clock."

" All right," said Dare. " As for me, I'm going across the square to that barber's shop you see there, to get a hair-cut. Then I'll take a stroll around and be back here for you at three sharp."

They parted on that understanding.

CHAPTER V

ON THE TRAIL

BEN overslept. That is to put it mildly. He woke with a start to discover that it was five o'clock. After magnifying his conduct in appropriate language he hurried on deck to look for Dare. But there was no sign of Dare either on board or ashore on the quay.

Ben, frankly, did not quite know what to do then. He thought it queer that Dare should not have roused him at the hour they had arranged to meet. Perhaps Dare had not come back at all. Or could it be that he had returned and, finding him, Ben, asleep, had gone ashore again? Ben was more inclined to think the former. And from thinking thus he began to wonder why Dare had not returned. Had he been prevented? Was he hurt? Ben turned cold at the thought of harm coming to the "cap'n's boy" while the latter was, in a way, under his care.

Well, there was no use in sitting still, he

decided, and set out to make inquiries. The men hanging about the quay helped him little. They could not remember seeing anyone of Dare's description in their vicinity during the last hour or so. Ben, shaking off their negatives impatiently, plunged across the square in the direction of the barber's shop. It was possible the barber might have noted which direction Dare had taken when he left the premises.

The barber, an exquisite to his finger-tips, scented, hair curled, beard drawn silkily to a point, smiled professionally as Ben entered, but lost some of his interest when he discovered that Ben was there merely to ask questions. He could, as it happened, speak English, and he began to do so with those flourishes most Latins find necessary in their attempts at self-expression.

A youth ? English ? But no. But yes ! It is to say, a young man, blond, sans barbe, with the air pleasing, and muscular, oh yes, muscular, most decidedly. The young man had come to his shop at two of the clock, but what he had come for it was not to be known, for to the most astonishment this young man after a reading of the journal short and inadequate, considering that it was the most admirable " Journal of the Débats,"

that young man had thrown down the journal with force and had run, yes decidedly, run from the shop with a manner excitable, l'air excité.

Ben listened with impatience, following the long rambling sentence with difficulty, due to the accent of the speaker.

" But what way did he go ? " he demanded of the barber.

Oh, as to that, it was to be regretted, but it was not known. Tiens, no ! The young man had gone so quickly.

Ben, seeing there was no more to be learned there, thanked his informant gruffly, and like an annoyed bear set off once again on his search, grumbling audibly at himself and the inadequacy of the information he had received.

Now what could have caused Mr. Dare to run from the shop like that ? Something interesting, belike. Or it may have been no more than a dog fight or a fight between street boys, which was much the same thing, seen from the shop window. In any event the fight, or whatever it was that had had him out of the place so quickly, was long over now. That was no explanation of his failure to turn up at three o'clock. But had he failed to turn up ? How did he, Ben,

know? He didn't know and he had to admit it.

He crossed the square in a humour which was a mixture of chagrin and anxiety, though as yet he could not very well see in what there was cause for the latter. It was broad daylight, and St. Pierre wasn't Port Said by any means; and a boy ought to be as safe on its streets as in St. John's. Still, there was no denying that there were more facilities for trouble in the French town for a venturesome lad, and Mr. Dare was all of that.

He returned to the quay and took a look at the *Nancy* in case Dare had returned, but the boy was still missing. Ben bethought him then of their intention to visit Giraud. What more likely than that Dare, not finding him waiting on the quay, had gone on to Giraud's alone? The boy might be there even now, still waiting for him.

At this thought Ben's mood lightened and he set out for Giraud's in the hope of reaching it before the store closed.

It was a comparatively easy matter to find one's way to Giraud's. Giraud had seen to that. From the harbour one could see the towering sign on his store, and once on shore, there was always to be seen round some corner or other, the one word, Giraud's.

The premises were next the dry dock on the opposite side of the waterfront. Dark, dingy, huge, lacking paint and adequate windows, the place was impressive only because of the vast quantities of merchandise it stored.

Huge butts of rum and brandy, seven feet in diameter, nearly all on tap, lay in the darkest regions. Piles of rope, mountains of paint tins, great anchors, barrels of tar, ochre, bales of oakum, etc., filled another section, and still another part of the premises was given up to lighter articles such as soap, tobacco, ship's biscuit, cheese, and margarine. All these commodities, each with a distinctive odour, gave the place an atmosphere indescribable. It was too strong to be attractive to most people, yet to some it was very pleasing, none the less.

Ben, who was not over delicate in such matters, wrinkled his nose in appreciation as he entered the store.

The entrance gave upon a small space which had the semblance of an office, with various merchandise as its walls. A cash register, a few account books, and a desk of polished wood on high rickety legs, together with an old clerk, deaf and shortsighted, completed the paraphernalia of the place.

Ben entered this space, gave " good day " to the deaf old clerk, and then looked about him for someone in authority—Giraud, if possible.

Down long lanes of merchandise he caught sight of several clerks and a number of customers. He hesitated which way to take, then was saved the necessity of choice by the appearance of the proprietor.

Ben recognized him from descriptions heard on the waterfront, and from a glimpse he had had of him in the old days. It was not a figure to be forgotten, once seen. Giraud was a man of commanding presence. His bulk alone inspired respect. He was enormously tall for a Frenchman, over six feet, and his immense girth, his great rounding shoulders, gave a suggestion of bull strength.

On top of this great mass of flesh was set a head which, in proportion with the trunk, looked ridiculously small. The face was clean shaven, and under a low forehead were set two crafty-looking eyes which hid their cunning under heavy half-lowered lids.

Ben was no more a match in duplicity for such a person than a new-born babe. He had the intelligence to realize this and decided that he would make the interview as short as possible.

Giraud's eyelids flicked once indifferently, and he felt that he knew all about Ben, his antecedents, his occupation, his very innermost thoughts.

"Mr. Giraud, I think," said Ben in his bluff, simple manner.

"Yes," admitted Giraud non-committally.

"I heerd of you from Sam Stooding," said Ben expansively. "I bought that there boat of his, the *Nancy*. A good boat, too, in her way. Sam finds out one way and another that I'm likely to make a trip to St. Pierre now and then, so he says to me, you take my word fer it, Ben—Ben Wheeler, that's me name—you take my word fer it, Ben, says Sam, you can't do better than trade at Giraud's if you ever think of bringin' in a little brandy or tobaccy. I got a good respect fer Sam; Sam knows what's what. So here I be and right glad to meet you, mister."

Giraud's face remained expressionless during this garrulous introduction, but he acknowledged Ben's cordiality with a slight nod not to be mistaken for the courtesy of a bow. He did not remember ever having heard Stooding's name before. But then, there were scores of his customers whom he never saw, much less knew by name, and it

was not the first time that the indirect recommendation of such had had good results.

He had little interest in Ben or Ben's needs. He knew that the order would be a small one, ridiculously small, he suspected, and as such it could very well be turned over to some subordinate. He was too good a business man, however, to show his feelings, whatever they were, and he proceeded with cut-and-dried flattering phrases to express his pleasure at Ben's having singled out his store for patronage.

Then he turned from Ben to call a clerk to attend to him. Ben, however, having guessed his intention, put up a deprecatory hand.

"I won't be tradin' fer a day or so," he said. "I just looked in to say howdy-do and to give your place a look over. Now I've done that and seen you, I'll be on my way. But I'll be back—oh aye, you can depend on that."

Giraud's eyelids flicked once again as though there were something in Ben's tone which he did not quite understand. Ben, who was looking as stupid as possible, noted this sign of aroused interest and proceeded to go. He had a feeling, rightly, that this big man was even more dangerous mentally than physically.

"Well, I reckon that's all," he pronounced heartily, and was about to turn away when he remembered what he had hitherto completely forgotten, that he was there to inquire about Dare.

"Now dang me! if I hadn't nearly forgot," he burst out. "My nevvy, you ain't seen my nevvy by any chance, I s'pose?"

Giraud, who was by now somewhat bored by Ben's presence, looked bewildered.

"Your what?" he asked.

"My nevvy," explained Ben. "A fine boy, gone eighteen, tall, with light curly hair and a laughin' face. He was goin' to meet me here, but blessed if I can see him."

"Oh, your nephew," said Giraud enlightenedly. "No, I have not seen him. But he may be here. The place is large. If you care to look around——" He waved his hand vaguely and indifferently towards the various departments with their mountainous barriers of merchandise, and taking Ben's acceptance of his invitation for granted, moved off.

He had not proceeded half a dozen paces, however, when a man nearly as impressive in appearance as himself entered the store, and sighting Giraud, exclaimed, "Ah, mon vieux, vous êtes là!"

"So, Pierre!" exclaimed Giraud, suddenly

animated; "but enter. I have been waiting for you. The stores, they are safely on board, yes?"

"Mais oui," answered Pierre. "Ça va bien," and talking vivaciously he walked arm in arm with Giraud down one of the long aisles of goods leading to Giraud's private office.

Pierre is one of the most common names in St. Pierre, as it is in other French towns, yet, none the less, when Ben heard it pronounced by Giraud he did not doubt for a moment that the new-comer so called was the Pierre of whom Madame Roquierre had spoken. Considerably elated by his discovery, he determined to take advantage of this accidental meeting and his situation by hanging about and keeping his eye on Giraud's office and the men in it.

Pierre's appearance had, more than his significant name, convinced Ben that he was on the track of a redoubtable man. Pierre, like Giraud, was tall, but there all resemblance between the two ceased. Pierre was lithe as a tiger, walked with a pronounced swagger, and had a shrewd open eye and an easy facile smile which, strangely enough in one who seemed to be a Frenchman, showed between moustache and beard of a glaring red.

He was like no Frenchman that Ben had ever seen, and come to that, like no man of any other nation he had met.

Less formidable mentally than Giraud, he was, as Ben was old and wise enough to judge, more to be feared than the proprietor where action was required, or in times when passions ran riot. Extreme caution would certainly be needed in dealing with either of them.

Keeping an eye on the clerks and the customers, and taking care always to be in sight of the office door, Ben strolled about, stopping now and then to finger a piece of yarn or a boat-hook or some such thing, as though contemplating purchasing. He had kept watch for about half an hour when he was rewarded by the sight of the office door opening and Pierre and Giraud emerging.

As he was within their range of vision he made haste to slip behind a high bale of goods, and as he did so he very nearly exclaimed aloud, for facing him was Dare!

Dare was nearly as much excited by Ben's presence as Ben was by his, and would probably have expressed his feelings in speech if Pierre's voice, speaking French, had not suddenly reached their ears.

They stared at each other and realized

that they were on the same quest, then without a word spoken they flattened themselves against the bales in case the two men should pass that way.

But Pierre, they soon learned, was leaving the store. They heard Giraud say "à demain," then heard him retreat in the direction of his office. Immediately they both headed for the street. They reached it just in time to see Pierre's rangy figure turn a corner, and followed hot-foot after him.

They had no time to exchange confidences or to give explanations at the moment, so concentrated were they on the affair in hand.

Pierre, they observed, was making by an indirect route for Treloar's wharf. And sure enough, at the end of ten minutes' walk, the trail ended there. Pierre, who had not, it seemed, the slightest suspicion that he was being followed, whistled for a boat and in a few minutes was being rowed towards the shipping in the centre of the harbour.

Dare and Ben ran on to the wharf and whistled for a boat also, but there was not one to be had. All they could do was to wait and see if possible what ship Pierre was boarding. They were fortunate in this,

for Pierre boarded a small schooner on the edge of the shipping.

"Now we've got to row out there and find out her name," declared Dare, speaking to Ben for the first time since their encounter, "or we may not know her again."

"I'd know her," stated Ben, who had been eyeing the schooner closely and expertly.

"All the same, we ought to know her name," insisted Dare, "and the best time to find it out is while she's under our eyes."

"Aye, perhaps you're right," said Ben, "but I wouldn't want them on board to catch us at it."

"Who's going to notice a rowboat passing astern?" asked Dare, and certainly in such a maze of shipping not much attention was likely to be paid to them.

They hurried on board the *Nancy*, and drawing up their dory, proceeded to make their way out into the harbour where lay their objective.

The schooner Pierre had boarded was a swift-looking little craft of about sixty tons, neatly rigged, painted dead black, with her deck bare of the fishing dories which most of her type in the harbour carried. Her deck seemed deserted.

It was growing dusk when Ben and Dare

neared her, and they could not read her name on her bow, it being very faintly painted. They made a detour and passed under the stern, and there they read plainly enough the legend: "Mary Lee, St. John's, Nfld."

"Well," said Ben in a harsh whisper as they rowed quietly by, "she's St. John's registered, but the feller who went on board her is a Frenchman or I'll eat my boots, though I do say he's the queerest lookin' Frenchman I ever seed."

"Partly," said Dare.

"Partly what?" asked Ben, not quite clear about what Dare was alluding to.

"Partly French. He's half English."

"How do you know?" asked Ben, surprised.

"I heard someone say so."

"You heard somebody say so!" repeated Ben.

"Yes. Ben, do you know who that fellow is?"

"I sartainly do," declared Ben, relishing his triumph. "That's the feller Pierre, that madame was talkin' about."

"It's Pierre all right," admitted Dare, "but, more than that, it's Payter!"

CHAPTER VI

DARE'S STORY

DARE related the events which had culminated in his dramatic meeting with Ben, when they returned on board the *Nancy*.

"When I left the quay I went straight across to the barber's," he told Ben. "He's a funny chap; smells like anything of scent; and talk—my word! he gets round a subject in the most complete way."

"I know," put in Ben; "I went over and asked him if he'd seen you."

"Ah, you did. Well, when I entered the shop he was busy shaving a sailor; American, I think. I sat down to wait my turn, and began looking at a paper to pass the time. While I was doing that and having a look round in between whiles, I began to listen to the barber, who was talking at a fearful rate.

"He talked about the weather, the town, the number of ships in the harbour, the state of his trade, and gradually he got more personal and began to try and pump the

sailor. But the sailor wasn't having any. All he answered was yes and no, and sometimes he didn't even bother to say that. But the barber didn't mind; he kept on. And finally he began to talk about hair; that was when he had finished shaving the man, and had suggested a hair-cut. The sailor told him to go ahead, and go ahead he did, cutting the hair and talking about it at the same time.

"'Mais it is the hair most distinctive,' he said, in that funny way he speaks English. It certainly was distinctive, that hair; like a carrot for colour, and as wiry as nails. The sailor grunted.

"'Yes, it is the hair distinctive and original!' went on the barber; 'the colour, ah! it is not often one sees such in St. Pierre.'

Knowing how red-headed chaps hate to have anyone mention the colour of their hair, I was half expecting that sailor to punch the barber one in the jaw. But all he did was grin.

"'Only one head is there to compare it with in St. Pierre,' went on the barber, who seemed really enthusiastic. 'Only one head, and that of a Frenchman.'

"'Never heard of a Frenchman with red hair before,' said the sailor.

"'There are many such in Normandy, oh yes. But this man I speak of he is only half French. He is part English, is the excellent Capitaine Pierre,' said the barber.

"When I heard that name I pricked up my ears. You never can tell, I thought; this might be the very Pierre Madame Roquierre was talking about.

"'That accounts for it,' said the sailor and I waited to hear what the barber would say. If he'd known how curious I was he couldn't have been more provoking, for what does he do but jaw about racial characteristics as revealed in the colour of complexion, hair, and so on, talk which the sailor couldn't understand even if he'd been listening. I got tired of hearing the jabber, and began to look at my paper again. By and by the sailor left, but there were two others before me. I didn't mind, as I had nothing to do, so I killed time by looking at my paper and looking out of the window alternately. The window, as you may have noticed, overlooks the square. And while I was looking out over the square I saw a tall man swaggering down the middle of it. And he had red hair!

"I know it was jumping to conclusions, but no sooner did I see him than I thought,

'That's Pierre!' and I made a bee-line for the door.

"Once out in the square I set about dogging the fellow, and a pretty chase he led me. He crossed the square, taking his time, visited a dock, two cafés, and finally he walked along the waterfront towards Roquierre's. He stopped to speak to a man on Buyez's wharf, but didn't stay long before he was off again. I was getting fond of the game by that time, and I forgot the hour, my hair-cut, and my appointment with you, so keen was I on finding out something about the fellow before I lost him.

"I thought he was bound for Roquierre's at first, but he turned off the waterfront into a side street, and pulled up in front of a grog-shop called Boitet's. I don't know if you know it?"

"Aye," said Ben, "I've been there. Well, what then?"

"He went in," continued Dare, "and after awhile I followed. It was easy enough. There was quite a crowd there drinking, and although I look pretty young, no one stared because there were Frenchmen there who looked no older than I did.

"This Boitet place is not like Roquierre's, as you know. It's smaller and it's divided

into two or three sections by thin partitions, which don't go as high as the ceiling and not quite as far along as the bar. The sections look like cubicles with one end knocked out.

"I couldn't see the red head in the section I entered, but as it was the closest to the door and I knew that he would have to pass by it on his way out, I didn't bother to look in the other cubby-holes to see where he'd got to. Besides, it would have looked too suspicious to go about staring into places.

"I sat down at a table set against the partition separating the first section from the second, and ordered one of those sirops, like I had at Madame Roquierre's, to pass the time.

"While I was sipping it and taking a look round, the red head turned up at the bar and began talking to the proprietor. His back was towards me. He stayed there talking quite a while, and every now and then he would look towards the door as though he was expecting someone, and sure enough he was.

"The door opened to let in a little bow-legged man with wide flaps of ears and a mouth that looked like a big slash right across his face. As soon as he saw Pierre he went up towards him, and touching his

sou'wester said something that I couldn't hear. Pierre didn't say a word, but led the man to a seat in the cubicle next mine. By the greatest good luck they were not far away from me, and they spoke English. I took advantage of my position to lean back against the partition, and although there were some words I missed, I heard enough to gather the sense of all they said.

"Pierre started it.

"'When did you get in, Bagley?' he asked.

"'A half-hour ago,' answered the man. 'Thurlton come with me—he's mindin' the boat. I come right ashore and walked straight here.'

"'How is everything?'

"'Couldn't be bettered,' declared Bagley. 'Sure, the coast is as quiet as an old maid's backyard.'

"'That fellow hasn't been making any more trouble, I hope?'

"'Not he, cap'n. Sure, he's a sick man. He'll know better than to be pokin' his nose in other people's business again, I warrant.'

"'Don't be too sure. I know that fellow by reputation. He's dangerous, whether he's got a cracked head or not. But let him look to himself if he interferes with me.'

"I tell you what, Ben, it made me think a bit the way he said that. I didn't feel a bit too comfortable myself. The man called Bagley laughed.

"'That's the talk, cap'n. But there's little chance of that fer a while, anyhow.'

"'Good. Now what about the tides?'

"'It's low water as near as you wants it at eleven o'clock to-morrow night.'

"'And smooth water?'

"'Aye, with the wind drawin' more off shore. That easterly kicked up a bit of a lop, but it's gone now.'

"'Well, we're loaded and ready,' said Pierre, 'and waiting on the weather. If it's in our favour you can expect us at eleven to-morrow night. Have all the shore hands ready. There's a heavy night's work in front of us. I'm going to run two or three bumper cargoes and then lay off a bit, to give the Revenue snifters time to get tired of laying for us. Once we have the stuff cached there's nothing to worry about. For although you trapped that Nosy Parker on the Spaleen road there's not a chance in a thousand of anybody ever happening on the place.'

"'Aye, that's so, cap'n. Sure, it was made for the business. The fools could

pass us by sea and land and never know we was there.'

"'Now look here, Bagley, there's one thing I'm not easy about. Are you sure the shore gang is on the square?'

"'As sure as you're sittin' there, cap'n.'

"'Then how came there to be six cases missing in the last accounting?'

"'Sure, there's always a few breakages, and you knows yourself how many a bottle goes to wet a customer's whistle at the time of selling him the stuff.'

"'Admitted,' said Pierre, 'but let there be less breakages in future. Understand me, Bagley?'

"'Aye, I'll see to it, cap'n.'

"They were silent for a while, as though they were drinking deeply; then Pierre started again.

"'Mind you,' he said, 'I'm not the man to bother about a case or two going the usual way—but no more than that. There's not a better paid crew on the Island than my lot, not to mention their shares of the profits. And, after all, who takes all the risks? I do. And who plans the business, and buys the stuff and gets a good cut off Giraud? Why, I do. It's easy enough to peddle the stuff when it's ashore, but it's

no easy thing running along that infernal coast on dark nights with no lights showing, and making in with no more than a few inches of water to spare under the boat's keel.'

"'Aye, you've reason to say so, cap'n,' agreed Bagley. 'But it ain't all fun fer me ayther, keepin' the shore gang bunch up to the mark. And if one of 'em was to squeal, where would I be?'

"'Where you'd deserve to be,' said Pierre. 'Hang me, do you think I'd put up with you a minute if you couldn't keep their tongues still in their heads? And what do you mean by talking of squealing, anyhow? Do you mean to say there's a chance of them doing so? For if there is, by the living image, I'll put the fear of the old 'un into them to-morrow night.'

"'Be aisy, cap'n, be aisy,' said Bagley, as though he was half scared. 'Sure, 'twas only a supposition of mine. There's no one goin' to squeal.'

"'You'll be the first to pay if anyone does, I tell you that, Bagley.'

"'Ah, sure, don't I know? Be aisy, now, cap'n, be aisy.'

"'All right. I hear you. Now get back to the coast and be ready for us. And double the look-outs at the cache. I don't

feel too safe since that nosy beggar turned up.'

"'I'll do it, cap'n. I'll be leavin' in a hour at most.'

"'And why not now?'

"'Sure, cap'n, a man must needs eat at times,' protested Bagley.

"'Well, hurry up then,' said Pierre, and I heard them push back their chairs. They both came out and made for the door. A man waved to Bagley as he passed, and Bagley, with a glance at Pierre, went up to him.

"The man must have asked him to stay and have a drink or something, for Bagley answered: 'Sure, I've no time. I have to be gettin' back. Payter is in a bad temper.' And then he followed Pierre.

"I realized then what I'd half guessed since the beginning of their talk, that Pierre was Payter. The English for Pierre is Peter, but an Irishman like Bagley would naturally pronounce it Payter. I followed the two till they separated at the quay, then I tagged on to Pierre again. I wanted to find out as much as I could while I had the chance. As it happens, he made straight for Giraud's. I waited till he'd been in the shop a few minutes, then I strolled in myself

and stepped right into your arms. The rest you know."

Ben was considerably impressed by Dare's story, and when it ended he gave expression to his feelings in his own peculiar way.

"That's what you might call a stroke of luck," he declared enthusiastically. "Here's news for the cap'n."

"Not yet," said Dare.

"An' why?"

"Well, what have we got to tell him, except that we've found out who Payter is?"

"Not much, 'tis true."

"Exactly. We knew there was a cache before, and that's all we know now. It's no good telling father about Pierre unless we can manage to have him caught red-handed. And before we can do that we must know where that cache is. That's our job and we've got to do it. I'd give anything to be able to make father's coup possible."

"Same here," declared Ben. "The question is, how?"

"Well, we've got to think about that. We've not done so badly so far."

"Aye. But there was luck in it. Still, the luck may hold."

"I very nearly boiled over when I heard

them call father a Nosy Parker. Well, Mr. Pierre, look out for yourself, that's all I can say."

"He seems a bad lot," remarked Ben.

"He's a dangerous man," declared Dare.

"There's no doubting it," admitted Ben. "If we knowed where he was going to land we could telegraph the cap'n and have him behind the bars pretty quick."

"If——" said Dare. "From this time on," he added, "we've got to keep watch on the *Mary* day and night."

"And what about when she leaves harbour?"

"We'll follow her. Are you willing, Ben?"

"More than willin'."

Their watch began next day. There was not much activity on board the *Mary*, and Ben rightly conjectured that the crew was sleeping in preparation for the night's work. The weather continued mild, and favourable to the smugglers' purpose, and there seemed no reason to doubt that she would leave harbour that night. Dare and Ben made their preparations accordingly.

"There's one thing knocks me," said Ben, "and that's the talk about the tide. Why wait fer low water when low water

means, as Payter said, that there'll only be a few inches under her keel ? "

" I was thinking of that too. It doesn't seem reasonable, does it ? "

" Nary a bit," declared Ben with conviction.

" That's another mystery we've got to solve. And that reminds me, Ben, we didn't say anything to dad about the ovens."

" What ovens ? "

" You know what that fellow said on board the *Glenbow*—that there'd be smuggling in Saltern while there was an oven in the Bay."

" Oh, aye. I remembers now. But it's my belief that man was drunk. What can ovens have to do with the matter, as I said to him ? "

" I don't think he was joking or drunk, now. You said yourself he seemed to know something. I wish we'd mentioned it to dad. It might have been a good clue."

" You could write him a line."

" We'll wait until we get back from our trip to-morrow. We might have bigger news to write then."

" Here's hoping. There's only one thing bothers me and that is, will the *Mary* be the beat of the *Nancy* ? If so, we ain't got much chance of keepin' in her company."

"Well, as it's a short trip and she's not due till eleven p.m. it's not likely that they'll drive her much. That ought to give us a chance to keep in with her."

"It won't be easy," said Ben, "and that's a fact. But there, we've had the luck so far, and it may hang on to us. I expect she'll leave around dusk," he went on to say. "That'll give her plenty of time. Payter won't risk not turnin' up on the hour. Like as not he'll be ahead of time. He'll draw in to the land, douse his lights and stand by."

"All the better for us if he does. If the place is near Saltern we might get a chance to slip into the harbour and give the warning."

"And the cap'n laid up in his bed!"

Dare's face fell.

"It had slipped my mind. Well, there's no use in meeting trouble half-way. The thing to do is to manage by hook or by crook to get some idea of where that cache is. We can think about what we'll do then afterwards. Our best chance is in trying to dog the *Mary* like we did her skipper."

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Ben.

"There's nothing we've forgotten? We're all ready to leave harbour?"

" We're all set," said Ben.

" Well, we haven't got much longer to wait."

They kept to the *Nancy* all day. During the afternoon there was some slight activity on board the *Mary*. Pierre was seen to go on shore and to return twice in three hours. Then there was once more a cessation of movement, and the calm that precedes action lay over the ship. Not over the harbour, however. A nice breeze from the south-west kept up its strength and showed no sign of dying out with the approach of night.

At six o'clock Dare, watching the *Mary*, saw a haze of smoke issuing from her quarter, about half-way down to her waterline. This puzzled him at first. Then he turned to Ben, enlightened.

" She's got an engine, petrol-burning," he said. " That'll make it hard for us if there comes a calm."

Ben sniffed at the weather, lifting his nose to the sky dog-fashion. " Rest easy," he said, " the wind will last."

" I've a hunch she'll leave soon," returned Dare, and went below to put on a jacket. He had not been there three minutes when Ben showed his head down the companion-way.

"The crew's on deck, breakin' out the anchor."

Dare went up, and looking to where the *Mary* lay, saw the foresail being hoisted by a deck engine.

"You're the skipper, Ben," he said. "Give the orders."

Ben, fastening down the flap of his sou'-wester, nodded.

"We don't want to tag her too close. We'll give her a mile or so to start with. In this light wind the *Nancy* can keep up with her easy, unless they start that contraption of an engine."

"Why not leave ahead of her?"

"That would never do. No, we got to take our chance and trail her. There! She's driftin'. Now the wind's got her sails. Stand by to cast off."

Half an hour later the two boats had passed the harbour rock and were heading for Saltern Bay.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE NIGHT

ONCE clear of the harbour the *Mary* set out on a course which would find her some miles off the Saltern coast by ten o'clock, if she kept to it. Ben and Dare were nowise put out by this. They had expected some such tactics. With the falling of night the *Mary* would draw in to the land, there was no doubting that. So they sailed resolutely on the same course.

The *Nancy*, as Ben had prophesied, had little difficulty in keeping in sight of the *Mary*, partly due to the fact that Pierre's boat did not use her engine and thus the propeller acted as a drag, and partly due to the light wind which was in the *Nancy's* favour.

The wind was south-west and the course the *Mary* had taken meant she would have to beat her way back to the land, when she changed her course. Up to nightfall they had no difficulty in keeping the *Mary* in sight, and they did it without getting near

enough to her to excite too close an inspection. When dusk deepened into night, however, their task became more difficult, for the stay lights of the *Mary* were not visible from behind, and they had to rely on the light in her cabin to guide them.

The wind also began to show signs of freshening, and this adding to the *Mary's* advantage, threatened to take her so far ahead that she would be lost sight of in the growing density of the night.

At this period of their chase Ben was in the bow and Dare at the helm, both straining their eyes in the effort to keep the light in view. They wisely carried no lights themselves.

Gradually the form of the *Mary* was entirely hidden from them and the will-o'-the-wisp cabin light was the only evidence they had of her existence. The night was as black as can be imagined, due to the lack of a moon, and the wind was coming off shore in increasingly bad squalls.

They managed to keep the light in view for an hour or so, then what they had dreaded happened and they lost sight of it. It was now ten o'clock.

To their great joy, however, the *Mary's* port light suddenly came into view and

realization of what had happened dawned on them. The *Mary* had swung off her course and was heading for the land.

They were about to imitate her when the port light suddenly went out and left them completely lost now as to the schooner's position.

Ben came running aft to Dare.

"She's doused her lights," he shouted. "We might have known they'd do it 'fore beatin' in to the land. We're done for."

It certainly seemed as though their chase had ended for that night. The blackness was such that without some kind of beacon it was impossible even to guess where the *Mary* lay. When this happened the *Nancy* had been about half a mile or so to the windward of the *Mary* and about a mile behind her; for Ben had had a thought for the necessity of beating in to the land later, and had kept as much to the windward as possible.

It became necessary to decide how they should now act. Dare, frankly, was at a loss to know what to do, but Ben was not without hope that they might pick up the *Mary* again if they hauled in a little to the land.

The *Mary* was on her port tack. The *Nancy* was half a mile to the windward of

her. By laying in on the starboard tack they might come near enough to the *Mary* to pick up her cabin light again.

Curiously enough, neither Ben nor Dare thought of the obvious thing—that the *Mary* would use her engine and head straight for the land. They kept to their course.

They showed no lights, and as there was now in their vicinity another boat without lights, both were a menace to each other. Ben recognized the risk, but as they were on the look-out for the *Mary* he thought it was obviated by their preparedness. And so it might have been if the *Mary* had been on her port tack, as they thought. Instead of that, the schooner had lowered her sails and was heading for the shore in almost complete silence under the power of her motor.

Ben, in the bow of the *Nancy*, kept a sharp look-out, as did Dare at the tiller. Both ears and eyes were serving them. But the rising wind was a perfect cover for the movements of the *Mary*. Even if she had been to the windward of them it is difficult to say if they would have heard her quiet exhaust. As it happened she was to leeward, and heading such a course that in less than twenty minutes she was to bring a swift doom to the *Nancy*.

It was Dare who first became aware of the impending catastrophe. He had given a glance to leeward and there saw nearly on top of them the black mass of the oncoming ship. He gave a shout of warning and thrust the tiller hard down at the same time, but neither move served his purpose. The cry was too late to be acted upon, and before the *Nancy* could answer to her helm the bows of the *Mary* cut her relentlessly in two.

Dare at the impact was flung off his feet and momentarily stupefied. He retained enough of his senses, however, to reach up a hand instinctively for support, and fortunately he found the *Mary's* head rigging.

He felt the *Nancy* sink under his feet, and drew himself up towards the *Mary's* trembling bowsprit. He lay there a minute or so, breathless, and dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe, his ears filled with the rush of a great wind and the intermittent shouts of alarm voiced by the *Mary's* crew. Then, once more clear in his mind, he bethought him of Ben, who must have gone down with the boat. His heart sank at the thought, and considerably sobered by the tragic ending to their adventure, he began cautiously to make his way towards the *Mary's* deck.

The collision had almost as startling an effect on the *Mary's* crew as it had on Dare. At first they thought their own ship must be fatally hurt and there was a great rush on deck. Pierre, who had been below, was one of the first to reach the scene.

" What is it ? What's happened ? " Dare heard him shout.

" We've run down a boat," answered half a dozen voices. " We're sinking ! " " Show a light ! " shouted the more fearful.

" The first man that shows a light goes to the fishes ! " roared Pierre. " For'ard there, confound you, and see what's the damage. We can't be hurt or we wouldn't be driving ahead like this."

Strange to say, the engine had not been stopped. There was seemingly no thought of attempting to salvage boat or men, even if it had been possible. A callous lot, thought Dare bitterly.

Pierre's voice gave the crew confidence and three or four of them went into the bows to investigate, followed by their captain. Dare, climbing cautiously along the bowsprit, could hear them although he could not see them.

As he reached the bow and put a foot on the deck he collided with a moving body. There came a burst of vigorous speech.

Dare interrupted the tirade with a shout of joy. "Ben!" he cried, "is it you?"

"Aye, it's me," replied Ben, wringing Dare's hand and gasping painfully for breath. "It's me, what's left of me, and mighty glad I am to see you. I thought you'd gone down with the boat."

"And I thought you had gone."

"'Tis a great mercy."

Further conversation was interrupted by the surprised shouts of the crew.

"There's two of 'em on the bowsprit!" someone cried.

"What's that?" Pierre himself came running at the surprising information.

"They're a-comin'," said Ben in a whisper to Dare. "Keep your head and leave everything to me."

"Hello!" they heard Pierre shout, "is anyone there?"

"Aye, we're here right enough," answered Ben as though he were in a passion, "we're here right enough, what you've left of us. And what we wants to know is this—what do you mean by runnin' without lights, eh? You've lost us a boat and nearly our lives, not to mention as nice a lot of liquor and tobaccy as ever you'd wish to see in a day's walk. What're you goin' to do about it, eh? I'll

have the law on you—aye, I will, you cold-blooded bunch of deep-water murderers ! "

" Close his mouth, somebody," shouted Pierre, incensed, " or he'll have every boat within five miles coming to see what's the matter. Bring them aft. Hey, you, how many are there of you ? "

" Two," shouted back Ben, " and it's a good job for you there ain't more."

" Bring them aft," repeated Pierre impatiently.

" We don't need to be brought," said Ben. " We'll come quick enough. We wants a word or two with you, mister."

And stumbling along in the dark as best they could, led by the crew, now thoroughly recovered from their scare, they eventually reached the cabin where Pierre had preceded them.

The scene held a certain dramatic quality. Pierre was seated on the cabin table, one foot swinging slightly, his arms folded, a scowl of disapproval on his high-boned face. Ben stood before him truculently, a bit shaken by the shock of the accident and more than a little angry in consequence.

Dare kept in the background as much as possible, as Ben had directed.

" Well ? " rasped Pierre.

" No, it's not well, mister," burst out Ben, indignant at this insolent reception, for Pierre, far from expressing any regret for the accident, seemed to expect regret to come from the other side. " No, it's not well, and if that's all you've got to say there'll be trouble."

" What's your grouch, anyhow ? " demanded Pierre. " I didn't run you down. You ran under my bows, didn't you, when I had the right of way ? "

Ben gasped at the impudent assertion.

" But you wasn't showin' no lights," he shouted. " How'll you account fer that ? "

" And what about yourself ? " demanded Pierre. " Where were your lights ? My men didn't see them."

" That's got nothin' to do with it. I was runnin' a small punt. Expect me to have port and starboard lights on a fishin' punt ? It's you, mister, who'll have to answer that question, and before a court, and right soon."

Dare, who was observing the growing blackness of Pierre's face, thought Ben was going a little too far. The moment was inopportune to interrupt, however.

" What do you mean by talking about a court ? " asked Pierre, ominously quiet.

Ben did not hesitate.

"What do I mean? Well, I like that. Mean to say you think I'm not goin' to report this and get damages?"

"I wouldn't advise you to," said Pierre simply.

Dare began to get uneasy.

"Oh, aye," said Ben. "Maybe you'll tell me how to get me money back fer the boat? It warn't insured."

"I'll tell you this. You won't get any money at all if you don't drop that tone. Do you know who you're talking to?"

"No, I don't. But I'd like to know—aye, and to have the name of your boat, too."

"You'll get it—perhaps."

Ben, having sufficiently worked upon Pierre's feelings to divert any suspicion there might have been as to their real identity and their object in these waters, began to speak in a milder manner.

"Look here, cap'n. I know I'm a bit hot under the collar, but wouldn't you be if you was in my boots? That there boat had most everything I own in the world on board her, and when you sunk her you very nearly sunk us with her. I'm standin' on me rights, that's all. I'm askin' for a square deal. And I don't want to go to no court if there's a chance of settlin' outside."

"You're talking more sensibly now," said Pierre. "A minute ago I thought I'd have to throw you overboard. Don't you suppose I've got a grievance, having a clumsy idiot like you fall afoul of me on this night of all nights? Man, what's your boat to me, or you, compared to my business? Bah!"

"That's a high an' mighty tone to take, cap'n," said Ben doggedly. "But you can't help admittin' you was in the wrong, runnin' without lights."

"Wrong! Can I help it if my lights fail me at the moment you were crossing my bows?"

"Well, I ask you, could I help it, cap'n? Be fair now."

"It doesn't matter to me what you could help. I'd like to help you ashore with the toe of my boot. Falling foul of me like that! What am I going to do with you, that's what I want to know?"

"You can pay me for my boat and put me ashore, that's what you can do."

"Oh?"

"Aye, and that's fair enough, too. If I had me rights you'd pay for the brandy and tobac——"

Ben stopped suddenly as though he had said too much. Pierre eyed him closely.

"What's that about brandy and tobacco?" he demanded sharply.

"Never you mind," said Ben secretively.

"But I do mind," said Pierre, smiling maliciously. "Smuggling, eh?"

"Prove it," defied Ben.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Ben's hint at his feigned activities had evidently changed the current of his thoughts. His mood lightened, though annoyance still showed on his face. Dare and Ben, knowing his business, could guess at its cause.

Their appearance on board was in the nature of a dilemma, for he had neither the time nor the inclination to land them forthwith, even though they could come to an agreement over the damages due to Ben for the loss of his boat. He eyed them gloomily.

"How much was that tub of yours worth?" he asked.

"She warn't no tub, cap'n. She was a smart-lookin' fishin' boat in prime condition, and I paid sixty-five dollars fer her to Sam Stooding in Shagtown a few days ago, and five dollars fer the fo'c'sle fittings."

"I'll give you seventy-five dollars," said Pierre; "that'll cover her fully."

"Aye, it'll cover the boat."

"You're not thinking of trying to get me

to pay for your liquor, are you ? " sneered Pierre. " Try it in a court. Be funny, wouldn't it, to hear you explain what you were doing with the stuff in Saltern Bay ? "

" I ain't sayin' nothin'. I'll take the seventy-five, cap'n."

" On this condition—that you take to my rowboat, row to land, and keep your mouths for ever shut."

" Take to a boat on a night like this ! " exclaimed Ben in dismay. Now that he and Dare were on board the *Mary* they were not in a hurry to leave her until they had gained some idea as to her destination, and the exact location of the cache.

" Why not ? "

" Why, before we knowed where we was the wind would blow us across the Bay and wreck us on Brunette."

" I'll give you a sail. By taking a straight course you can lie easy to Shagtown."

" But, cap'n," protested Ben, " that ain't no way to treat a man you've runned down."

" You can go in the boat or swim," burst out Pierre impatiently, and hurried on deck to consult his mate.

Ben and Dare, left alone in the cabin, stared at each other, not daring to speak their thoughts for fear of being overheard.

They heard a brief vivid argument between Pierre and another on deck; then, before they could comment on it, Pierre returned to the cabin.

He was seriously put out now. The mate had vigorously protested against turning the two men adrift in the boat. And he had produced two good reasons why it should not be done. In the first place it was their only boat and they might need it themselves. In the second place, if the two men were turned adrift and later rowed into some harbour in a boat with the *Mary Lee's* name on it, there would be talk, whether the men promised to keep their mouths shut or not. Pierre could not deny the truth of this, and the mate won the day.

When Pierre returned to the cabin he ignored Ben and Dare, while he considered the problem their presence presented.

"Who are you?" he demanded at last. Ben told him. "Me name's Ben Wheeler. This is me nevvy, in a way of speakin'."

"Where do you come from?"

"Me home's wherever there's a honest penny to be turned. The *Nancy* was me last. I don't know where me next will be."

"Nor I," said Pierre grimly.

Up to this time Dare had been silent, but now he boldly turned on Pierre.

"Why can't you land us at the port you're making for, captain?" he asked.

"Ah, why!" said Pierre sarcastically. "Because I don't choose to."

"That's not much of a reason."

"It's all you'll get."

Pierre seemed to be talking in order to gain time to puzzle out the affair. Hesitation of any kind was foreign to his nature, but in this case he was forced to vacillate. He was completely at a loss as to how to deal with his unwanted guests. To land them on the coast in the vicinity of the *Mary Lee's* impending operations would be the height of folly. To turn them adrift in the boat would be far from wise. The best plan of all was to take them back to St. Pierre, but that would mean their presence on board during the landing of his illicit cargo. He did not care to decide on either course, yet could not see another way out of his difficulty.

In the end action was forced upon him. There came the subdued sound of voices on deck, the soft patter of feet overhead; then a face was thrust down the companion-way of the cabin. It was that of the mate.

"We've just picked up the shore signal, cap'n," he warned.

Pierre jumped to his feet.

"Lower the spars," he ordered. "I'll be on deck in a minute."

He turned to Ben and Dare.

"This way," he said, and led them to his own private stateroom; a box of a place with a bed, a desk, a few charts, a chair, a dory compass, and other small articles.

Dare and Ben entered the room, wondering what Pierre's intentions were. They soon found out. When they were fairly inside, Pierre slipped behind them and before they could make a move had darted out of the room and shut the door. The key turned in the lock and they were left virtually prisoners.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET HARBOUR

BEN and Dare found themselves in complete darkness. Their surprise at their sudden imprisonment robbed them of speech for the moment, then found expression.

"Here's a mess!" exclaimed Ben.

Dare nodded, then remembered that Ben could not see him in the dark. "We might have expected something like this," he said.

"Well, there'll be a reckoning, no fear of that," growled Ben angrily.

"So long as it's a reckoning we don't have to pay, I don't mind," said Dare, for Pierre's personality had impressed him and he could not help remembering the summary treatment handed out to his father.

"Never a fear. It won't be us who'll pay. Keep up your pecker, Mr. Dare."

"Not so loud, Ben," warned Dare in a whisper. "We don't know if anyone can hear us or not."

"Aye, that's so. A word in season. Well, we won't stay in the dark anyhow; I've got some matches."

Striking one of them, he looked round for a lamp. One was discovered hanging over the bed. It took only a moment to light it. By its glow they were enabled to examine more completely the room in which they were confined.

It had but one outlet: the door through which they had entered. One side of the room gave upon the hold; the other three walls were formed by the side of the ship and two strong partitions. The door was of mahogany and too strong to be forced. There were perforations above it, but that was the only way air could get in or out, for there was no port-hole or fanlight.

"As watertight as a coffin," was Ben's estimate of their quarters. "We'll get out when he's a mind to let us out, and not before." He tried the door, just to substantiate his estimate of its solidity. It did not budge.

"Well, here we are," he declared philosophically, and sat down on the bed.

Dare followed his example. Their minds went back simultaneously to the moment of the accident.

"We found the *Mary* all right," said Ben grimly, "but I never thought we'd learn where she was like we did."

"I happened to look to the leeward," said Dare, "and I saw her on top of us. I gave a shout."

"Aye, I heard it just before the crash. I was wellnigh throwed overboard by the shock. But it so happened that when I flung out me hand I found the *Mary's* bobstay, and hung on to it. Our boat sunk in two minutes."

"She must have been cut right in half," said Dare.

"Aye."

They both considered their marvellous escape for a few minutes, then relegated it to the back of their minds as a subject for future discussion. There were other things to be considered now.

"I don't think there's any suspicion as to who we are," whispered Dare close to Ben's ear.

"Nary a bit," agreed Ben. "You noticed how quick he was to believe we was smugglers like hisself?"

"Yes. You did that well. First and last you've had to tell a lot of whoppers, Ben."

"Ah, sure, they is not black lies, they is just white lies. There's no one goin' to think the worse of me fer them."

"Not at all. I wonder what's going to happen now."

"There's no sayin'. Dear knows what he wouldn't do if he got an inklin' of our business."

Dare agreed. "We've got to try and get more in his confidence," he said.

"That'll take some doin'."

Their conversation was interrupted suddenly by the hurrying of feet overhead and the distinct roar of breakers.

"Heavens! he's driving her ashore!" exclaimed Dare.

"He's certainly taking her near the land," admitted Ben anxiously.

They listened to the light, running footsteps overhead. Except for that sound, considerably deadened by the roar of the breakers, no other noise reached their ears. The *Mary* was making port with a minimum of disturbance on board. Dare and Ben tried to visualize the conditions of the ship's approach to the land, but only succeeded in being puzzled. They were off a straight and precipitous coast intersected here and there by coves, but so far as they knew with nothing in the way of a harbour. Yet here was the *Mary* practically among the breakers, and still going ahead! It seemed that there was a secret harbour of some sort. Otherwise, how account for the schooner's near-

ness to the shore ?—unless Pierre had overestimated his distance from the land and had suddenly found his ship among the breakers. But that event would surely have produced more alarm and accompanying noise than was evidenced on deck now.

Their puzzled thoughts found expression. "Why did they lower the masts, Ben? You heard the order. It's strange for a boat this size to have masts that can be lowered at will, isn't it?"

"Aye. And why wait for low water, when low water means there'll only be a few inches under her keel?"

"It's as if they had to go under something. . . ."

"Mr. Dare!" exclaimed Ben, "you've hit on the very thing. They're goin' under somethin'; somethin' that's not very high and therefore has to be gone under at the lowest tide possible!"

There seemed indeed reason to believe that Dare had discovered the solution of the puzzle.

"But under what?" asked Dare.

"Aye, that's the question. I can't begin to think of what. It passes belief or understandin' when you thinks of the coast we're on."

The roar of the breakers suddenly increased. At the same moment there came a decided bump of the vessel's keel as it touched bottom. For a wild moment Dare and Ben thought the ship lost and visualized themselves being drowned like rats in a trap. Then the ship floated tranquilly again. . . .

And then, with only the previous roar of the breakers for warning, there broke upon their ears a perfect pandemonium of sound. Even in their retreat they had to raise their voices to be heard above it. It was as if immense copper gongs were being beaten with giant hammers of steel.

It took Dare and Ben several minutes to recover their equanimity.

Then Ben burst into excited speech.

"We're in a cave!" he shouted. "We're in a cave! That's the sea breakin', that sound we hears. Of all things! Would you believe it!"

Dare willingly believed it. There was no other adequate explanation. The cave would act as an enormous sound-box with super-acoustic properties, and the waves breaking against its rocky walls would echo in its vaulted roof until the sound emanating from them would be increased a thousandfold, developing into the din of an inferno. But

a cave large enough to harbour a schooner of sixty tons! It did not seem feasible. If it existed it would surely be too well known to make a safe base for the smugglers. Yet——

"I believe you're right, Ben," said Dare, "but I can't conceive a cave like that."

"Aye, it must be a big one. An' to think we passed close to this coast and didn't see it! Hallo!" he added, "they're takin' off the hatches. And listen, you can hear shoutin'."

It seemed that with the entering of the secret harbour all caution was thrown aside, so sure were the smugglers of the safety of their retreat. There were shouts from many throats echoing in the vault in which the ship lay, sounding above the terrific clamour as the shrill cries of the seagulls sound above a great storm. Accompanying the shouts were the creak of tackle and the noise of the cargo being dumped on deck. There was great activity in the hold, separated from them by a single stout partition, and voices speaking French and English reached their ears.

There seemed to be a score of men; certainly many more than the ship carried as crew. Dare and Ben's curiosity grew almost beyond bounds. They would have

given anything to be on deck, witnessing what was going on. If they remained imprisoned while the ship was in the cave they would be no wiser as to its position on the coast than before they entered it.

Ben threw his bulk against the locked door once or twice, more as a result of impatience than in the belief that he could force an exit through it. Then he desisted.

They sat for some time, half an hour or so, listening to the feverish activity centring about the ship. Then, so unexpectedly as to startle them, there came the sound of the key being turned in the lock. The door opened and Pierre once more stood before them. Neither Ben nor Dare moved. Pierre entered the room, closed the door, and placed his back against it, smiling sardonically the while.

"High-handed actions, cap'n," said Ben at last.

"It was necessary," returned Pierre frankly. "I couldn't have you coming on deck at the moment of making harbour. I'm on private business, you understand; that's why I've been puzzled what to do with you. Now I've made up my mind. You'll have to come back to St. Pierre with me."

"It's as you say, cap'n," Ben agreed, hardly able to hide his relief and satisfaction. "We're seemin'ly at your mercy. I reckon you'll pay for the boat?"

"I'll pay as I promised," said Pierre; "seventy-five dollars. You'll get it when I put you ashore, and I'll expect you to keep your mouth shut in the bargain."

"You can count on that, cap'n. I'm no tale-bearer. Sure, you could land your liquor and tobaccy in broad daylight as far as I'm concerned."

Pierre did not look so startled as this revelation of Ben's knowledge of his business would have caused one to expect. He seemed to think temporizing necessary, however.

"Liquor and tobacco!" he said. "What are you talking about?"

The pretence was vain.

"Sure, cap'n, I can smell both a mile away, and this boat stinks of them," declared Ben boldly.

There certainly was a distinct odour of both in the cabin. The fact had to be recognized, though not explained, as far as Pierre was concerned, even if indirectly he acknowledged its existence.

"Well, what about it?"

"Nothin'," said Ben. "We knows what we knows. I've done the same on a smaller scale in me time."

Pierre said nothing for a moment or two, but eyed them thoughtfully, as though once more in doubt as to the best way to handle the situation.

"This makes a difference," he said at last; "but I've no time to talk to you now. There's work for me on deck."

Then, with the same swift movements which had characterized his entrance, he let himself out of the room, once more locking the door behind him.

"Now you've gone and done it!" declared Dare ruefully.

"How so?" asked Ben.

"Why, do you think he's going to be as easy with us now that we've as good as told him we know he's a smuggler?"

"Why not? He must have known we guessed there was something funny in the wind or he wouldn't have asked us to keep our mouths shut."

"Nevertheless, I don't see why you wanted to make him certain we knew."

"I thought it best to be open," explained Ben. "If we'd pretended we didn't smell somethin' fishy he might have suspected

we wasn't on the square with him. Never a fear, we won't lose by that. One thing, he'll be open with us now."

Dare looked dubious and paced up and down the confined space at their disposal. He eyed their quarters moodily, his gaze wandering from the bed to the charts on the walls, the bare floor, and the one chair and desk. On top of the desk was an assortment of small articles, a few screws, a pair of compasses, a file, a tin of tobacco, a pocket knife, and a key. The latter caught Dare's attention and a surmise rose to his mind. He took the key, regarded it for an instant; then, going to the door, thrust it in the lock. He turned it. It functioned, and the door came open under his grasp.

When this happened Ben, who had been regarding Dare's movements curiously, rose to his feet with an exclamation. Dare turned to him with suppressed eagerness.

"It's open!" he said.

"Aye."

They both stared at the open door thoughtfully, then Ben resumed his sitting posture on the bed.

"You'd better shut it again," he advised.

"Why?"

"What good'll it do us? If we went on deck Pierre would be as mad as blazes and we'd spoil what we've done. Even if we could get away, we don't want to go yet awhile. Not until we knows where this here cave is."

"We could get a look at it now, if we went on deck."

"Too risky. You don't want Pierre to catch you spyin'."

Dare was not to be dissuaded, however. He was fired at the thought of catching a glimpse of the secret harbour and the activity on deck.

"I'm going, anyhow," he said, and after ascertaining that the cabin was empty he slipped out of the room, taking care to shut the door firmly behind him. He stood still in the middle of the cabin for a full minute, then cautiously mounted the ladder leading to the deck. He was facing the taffrail as his head emerged. There was no one in that part of the ship. He summoned sufficient nerve to raise his head high enough above the shutter to view the whole of the scene about him.

The ship, as Ben had surmised, was in a cave. An immense cave it was, vaulted like a cathedral. Huge splinters of rock

hung like icicles from its roof, and its walls gleamed black as ebony in the light of immense flares which dotted the ship's deck and rose in tiers high up into the cave, illuminating what Dare guessed to be a rocky stair leading either to the cliff-top or to some inner chamber. Yet so intense was the blackness within the cave that the flares only lit up their immediate vicinity, and deepened the intensity of the darkness outside their bright circles.

There was grandeur in the scene, a grandeur heightened by the great volume of sound which echoed through the cave like the emanations of a gigantic pipe organ with all stops pulled full out. The noise had been immense even when heard in the seclusion of the cabin, but here on deck it was deafening.

The mind rocked under its assault and in Dare it caused a confusion which made the scene partake of the quality of a nightmare. The flitting figures of the crew, each carrying a case and sometimes two on his shoulders, had an air of unreality. Their activities seemed fantastic and their movements queerly mechanical. The cave seemed to hold itself aloof from the use to which it was being put, gloomily voicing continual rumblings which might be interpreted as

threats to the invaders, but which served the smugglers as a perfect cloak for their illicit work.

So far as Dare could see there was no beach here. The water ran deep right to the cave's limits, and the ship was lying close against the rock, her side protected by immense rope fenders.

The crew were carrying the cargo up a sloping, winding staircase whose top was lost sight of in the gloom, a narrow, treacherous staircase which it seemed that only goats could safely tread, but which the smugglers mounted with facility.

Dare searched in vain for the entrance to the cave. It was hidden in the gloom, but from the shape of the immense vaulted roof he could imagine it as being little more than a hole in the face of the cliff; a cliff solid in appearance, but hollowed out by some freak of nature.

No wonder the smugglers considered their base as being perfect for their purpose. It was all that Dare had ever conceived a smugglers' cave could be, and more. It was like no smugglers' cave he had ever seen or read of. He was a little awed by it, so strong an impression did its grandeur make on his sensibility.

He crouched in the companion-way, lost to the danger of detection, his whole mind given up to consideration and appreciation of the scene around him. The crew, fortunately, were too occupied to notice so small an object as his head rising above the cabin shutter, even if they had been able to see it in the shadows cast by the rigging.

He remained there, safe from disturbance or discovery, until the sudden emergence of the men from the hold caused him to think that the cargo had been discharged. He caught sight of Pierre and some of the crew making their way aft, and swiftly, with a minimum of noise, he returned to the cabin and Ben's company.

CHAPTER IX

CHECKMATE !

HALF an hour later the ship began to get under way. She made her exit from the cave without accident of any kind, though her sides scraped the rock in passing.

Dare and Ben sat waiting to be set free, or at least to receive some kind of notice from Pierre. But the ship had been at sea an hour before they were given attention. When they were far enough away from the cave to prevent their discovering even by hazardous guessing where it was situated, one of the crew unlocked the door and summoned them to appear before Pierre, who was waiting for them in the cabin.

Pierre did not waste any time in discussion, but went straight to the point in no uncertain way.

"You two know the smuggling game, eh?" he demanded.

"Well, cap'n——" Ben began to quibble.

"Say yes or no, hang you!" interrupted Pierre.

" Well then, it's yes."

" I thought as much. You know the business we're running, it seems. Now look here, I've got a proposition to make to you. I'm going to run two more cargoes in the next ten days or so. I'm two men short. I'll ship you two and pay you three times ordinary wages and a bonus for the two trips."

Ben and Dare were both so amazed at this unexpected turn in the situation that they could only stand and stupidly regard their gaoler.

" Well ? " demanded Pierre impatiently ; " say something, can't you ! "

" We hardly knows what to say, cap'n," said Ben, recovering a little from his surprise. " It's kind of sudden."

" Of course it's sudden. But it needn't take you aback like that. Well, what about it ? What's it to be ? "

Ben looked at Dare uncertainly, while Dare stared at him. They were both puzzled as to what were Pierre's intentions. Those intentions should have been fairly obvious. Pierre wanted to keep them under his personal supervision until he had finished running the big cargoes which were to herald a temporary cessation in the trade.

The easiest way of doing that was to keep them on board voluntarily. But he was quite capable of keeping them on board against their will if they did not consent to accept the offer he made them.

So confused were Ben and Dare at the sudden proposition that they did not think of this obvious reason for it. They were hopelessly puzzled as to Pierre's designs, and could only consider if it would be to their advantage to pledge themselves to stay on board. If they did they stood a chance of finding out where the cave and the cache it led to were situated. But they might not get an opportunity to utilize their knowledge until the cargoes were run, and thus the opportunity of taking Pierre and his crew red-handed would be lost, at least for some time.

On the other hand, if they refused the offer and went back to Saltern with such knowledge as they had, they might, by a close inspection of the coast from Saltern to Point Day, make the discovery of the cave's whereabouts in a few days and then be free to plan the coup that would end in the smugglers' capture.

It was true the coast had been searched many times already without result, but

with their special knowledge the task would be much more likely to yield success.

Those thoughts passed swiftly through their minds as Pierre sat impatiently waiting for their decision. Dare was inclined to stay on board, as that would be likely to yield the greatest amount of excitement, but Ben, with an eye to the main chance, was governed by his cautious instincts, and as it was he who was in charge he voiced their decision.

"If it's all the same to you, cap'n, we're much obleeged, but we'd like to leave at St. Pierre."

The captain's face clouded.

"Think again," he warned them harshly. "I'd advise you to accept my offer and save trouble. I'm giving you your chance."

A chance he was giving them certainly, but not much choice, for his manner dictated their final decision. Ben opened his eyes a little at the veiled threat, and began to understand a little better Pierre's intentions and the reason for them. This caused him to reverse his former decision without hesitation, for although Pierre as yet had not dealt in extremes, Ben felt him capable of doing so if thwarted.

"Of course, cap'n," he said cringingly,

" of course, if it's a favour to yourself and if you're wishin' it strongly, we'll sign on and be glad of the chance."

" I'm doing more than wishing it. I'm telling you to do it."

" Well then, cap'n, we will."

" You're wise," said Pierre with that sardonic note in his voice that he could call up so easily; but he looked a little pleased none the less. The decision saved time and trouble.

" Then that's all right," he added. " You'll be a lot better off in pocket and perhaps in other ways. Now you can go for'ard and turn in with the rest of the crew. The mate will show you there. But no talking to the crew, you understand."

" Aye," said Ben, and Dare nodded in agreement.

Pierre then called down the mate, a rough, hard-looking case who regarded the new recruits in no over-friendly manner. His name was Hines, and he acknowledged their existence with a baleful glare. He respectfully inclined his head toward Pierre, however, while the latter explained Dare and Ben's new status on board. Evidently Pierre was held in something like awe by his subordinates. Hines, having taken his orders, turned to leave the cabin. " Now

then, you two ! " he snarled in a thoroughly ill-humoured way, and Ben and Dare falling to heel were led for'ard.

The fo'c'sle was in semi-darkness, and those of the crew not on watch were asleep in their berths. Hines pointed out a narrow, coffin-like space in which there was only a straw-stuffed mattress.

" That'll have to do for the two of you," he said. " We're more than full-up here already. You can git blankets when we reaches St. Pierre."

With those words he left them. They watched him go, then turned to their berth. There was no chance of talking without being overheard, so the only thing to do was sleep. As they had not slept for twenty-four hours they found it possible to find forgetfulness even in such an uncomfortable bed, and they did not wake to reality till late in the morning.

Dare was the first to stir. He woke to find himself in unfamiliar surroundings. The smell of frying fish assailed his nostrils, and the grumblings of the crew struggling out of their berths filled his ears. To his surprise the schooner was stationary. So far as he could determine they were once more at St. Pierre.

Excited by this possibility and interested beyond everything in his surroundings, he sprang lightly out of his berth on to the fo'c'sle floor.

The others of the crew who were stirring regarded him curiously.

"It's the feller we runned down last night," said one. "Where's the old one?" asked another. "There in his berth," was the reply.

Dare felt somewhat embarrassed at being discussed as though he were not present. The crew had none of his sensitiveness, however, and what they didn't know they proceeded to ask about until they were in possession of an expurgated account of the circumstances attending the arrival of the two in the fo'c'sle.

Their curiosity satisfied they sat down to the table, and the cook, a Frenchman, bearded, stout, and as far removed in cleanliness and skill from the conventional idea of a French chef as can be imagined, served them.

Dare roused Ben, who woke in full possession of his wits and proceeded immediately to meet the crew on their own ground of familiarity. The cook pointed out two places which they were told to take, and they breakfasted with the others.

Silence hung over the table—that is, a conversational silence—until all food in the immediate vicinity had been consumed. Then some of the men went on deck. Others returned to their berths.

Ben questioned the cook, who was not averse to gossip, as to the hour of their arrival, and discovered that they had arrived at St. Pierre at five o'clock, and that it was now ten.

"Didn't hear a sound," confessed Ben. "Dog-tired we was, both of us. You fellers nearly made us food fer the fishes last night."

"Tiens!" said the cook. "An' your boat, she has give me the one fright. Mon Dieu, it was to think the ship she was killed!"

"Well, all's well that ends well," said Ben soothingly. "What say if we goes on deck?" he added to Dare.

Dare jumped at the suggestion and made for the companion-way. Ben followed him.

Those of the crew who were on deck were idly smoking and gossiping, overlooked by the mate who, seated on the cabin roof, was keeping an officious eye on both ship and men.

Ben led the way casually to the rail near the break-deck, where they were fairly well isolated, and seating himself, motioned to Dare to follow his example.

"Well, here we are," he said, keeping his voice as low as possible.

"Yes."

"And no choice but to be here. You don't doubt that after what he said last night?"

"No," replied Dare. "There was nothing else to do. Anyone could see with half an eye that he was going to keep us on board whether we wanted to stay or not."

"Aye. The cap'n wouldn't be easy if he knowed," Ben stated.

"There's no need for him to know until we see this thing through."

"I s'pose not. We'll have to send him one of them O.K. telegrams to-morrer."

"Yes. I'd write him also if he could do anything with the information we can give him. But as he's laid up there's not much use. It would only worry him. We'll wait till we know more and he can get about. That ought to be in ten days or so. I can't see us staying on board this craft after we once know what we want to know, can you?"

"No," admitted Ben. "Once we finds out fer sure where that cave is and gets a chance to make a break, we're off fer Saltern."

"There's the crew getting out the boat," said Dare after a short pause in their

conversation. "We might ask to go ashore too."

"We'll do that," agreed Ben, and walked aft to solicit shore leave of the mate.

"Go ashore?" growled that individual. "No, you can't. Not by a long shot."

"This afternoon, p'r'aps?" suggested Ben with appropriate humility.

"No, nor then."

"Well, to-morrer?"

"No, nor to-morrer, nor the next day. See?"

"No, I don't see," said Ben. "Who give them orders, if I might ask?"

"The capting, that's who. If you wants to go ashore you can whistle yourself there. My orders is to keep you on board and in sight till we sails again."

Ben, considerably discomfited by this information, rejoined Dare and told him what had taken place.

"We might have expected it!" said Dare. "He's not taking any chances."

"Aye. But this don't make things more easy fer us. Why, we can't even wire the cap'n O.K. or send him a note. Looks like it ain't goin' to be as easy to leave this one as we thought."

"We'll leave her when we've got a mighty good reason for doing so, don't you fret,

Ben," said Dare, who considered that Pierre had contracted one more debt that would have to be paid with interest. "As for sending a cable to father, we might find some way of doing that yet. We'll have to use our brains. We can't let this bunch get the better of us."

"One thing's certain," growled Ben; "that feller Pierre is goin' to get a big surprise one of these days. If I ever meets him alone on a dark night—— The high-handedness of that feller is beyond belief. I'm goin' to tackle him when he comes on deck to know what he means by keepin' us shut up like chickens in a coop."

"Best not to make trouble," said Dare.

"I'm not goin' to make trouble. I'm only goin' to protest. Come to that, it wouldn't seem natural to him if I didn't."

But he got no chance of protesting to Pierre that day. The captain had already gone ashore and he did not return, but spent the night on land. About noon the next day, however, he came on board and was closeted for a long time with the mate. When he appeared on deck it was once more to go ashore. Ben had the temerity to intercept him as he was about to board the waiting boat.

"What's this, cap'n, about me and the boy not bein' allowed to go ashore?" he asked.

Pierre turned on him shortly. "Don't bother me with your troubles," he said. "Take your orders from the mate."

"But, cap'n——" began Ben in protest.

Pierre, impatient, unexpectedly struck out with his clenched fist, and as Ben landed his length in the scuppers he said: "Do I have to tell you twice, curse you! Take your orders from the mate."

Ben got to his feet, his hand feeling at his damaged jaw, and rejoined Dare, rage eating at his heart.

They did not make the mistake of asking for leave again, but waited their opportunity to go ashore without leave. The opportunity did not arrive, however. They found themselves kept under close surveillance. The mate or one of the crew unostentatiously shadowed their every movement.

When two days passed and they failed to escape the vigilance of the crew even for sufficient time to hail a passing boat, they began to get anxious. Captain Stanley, they knew, if he did not receive a cable in another day or so, would become alarmed and might make inquiries in St. Pierre

which would wreck their plans and might very conceivably endanger their position.

On the fourth day in port they began to load again, and the talk for'ard was that they would be leaving on the night of the sixth. There had been no confidential exchanges between Ben and Dare and the rest of the crew. Evidently the latter had been warned, for whenever Ben or Dare endeavoured casually to bring the conversation round to the subject of the *Mary's* activities, an uncompromising silence settled down.

They finished loading on the day they began taking cargo. After supper that evening Ben, smoking a pipe on deck, admitted to himself the hopelessness of trying to get into communication with Captain Stanley.

At that time of day the harbour was dotted with row-boats pulling to the quays, containing ships' crews bound ashore for a night's jollification. One such passed close to the *Mary*, where Ben was in sole possession of the deck, though a wisp of tobacco smoke, rising above the cabin shutter, showed that the vigilant mate was not far away.

Ben eyed the boat as he had eyed every boat which had passed the ship for days,

in the hope that it might contain some person known to him and that some way would be found to get a message sent to the captain.

As before he was disappointed. He knew no one in the boat, and therefore had no reason to hail her except for the purpose of asking for a lift ashore, and that was not possible while the mate was within earshot. To his surprise, however, he was hailed by one of the men in the boat, which contained four persons.

"That you, Ben? How goes it?"

At the sound of voices the mate came running on deck. He approached near enough to Ben to hear all that passed between him and the men in the boat. Ben, ignoring his presence, singled out the man who had hailed him and after a few seconds remembered him as an old shipmate.

"You Ames?" he called out. "What you doin' here?"

"We just got in from Lisbon. Bound to Saltern with salt. What you doin'?"

"Coastin' a bit."

"Goin' ashore?"

"Not the night. Might see you to-morrer."

"We sails in the morning."

"Too bad. Well, drink one fer me. And remember me to all old hands you see."

The boat then passed on, and the mate, after a suspicious look at Ben, went back to his seat in the companion-way.

Ben was delighted with the chance meeting and the opportunity it had given him of getting word to the captain. For Ames was bound to meet Captain Stanley in his official capacity at Saltern, and the captain, knowing him to have come from St. Pierre and to be an old shipmate of Ben's, would be sure to question him.

Ben turned to go below to inform Dare of the fortuitous incident, but before he could do so Dare came on deck. Ben saw from his face that something out of the ordinary had happened, and he kept back his own news till he had heard Dare's.

"What is it?" he asked.

Dare was labouring under great excitement.

"Ben, I've found out about the oven. You'll never guess. It's the cave!"

Ben was more bewildered than surprised.

"The oven . . . the cave?" he repeated.

Dare explained in detail.

"While I was lying down the sailors began to talk. They didn't mind me, apparently. They talked about sailing tomorrow night and one of them said he hoped

the water would be smoother than the last time they were at the Oven. The cave is called the Oven, it seems. That's what that fellow on board the *Glenbow* meant. And Ben! I think I know where it is. One of the men mentioned the Table. He said it was a nuisance and that some time the *Mary* would break her back on it in making the cave. Well, the Table is a queer, flat-topped rock. I heard the dad mention it by name when he talked about how he had inspected the coast. It's less than a mile from Saltern!"

Dare's excitement did not exceed Ben's once that worthy had fully grasped the value of the discovery.

"We got to get away from here as soon as we can," he said. "We got to get away before the *Mary* sails and find some way of sendin' word to the cap'n."

"Absolutely!" agreed Dare. "We'll try for it early in the morning."

But they did not. At nine o'clock that same night Pierre came aboard in a great hurry. In a moment the news spread that the *Mary* would sail that night . . . immediately. And half an hour later the schooner was nosing her way out of the harbour.

CHAPTER X

THE ESCAPE

PIERRE was in a great hurry. He pressed all sail on the schooner and started the engine, with the result that she began to cover the course at a great rate. A new moon was in its first quarter, but the sky was clouded, as it usually is on that coast, and acted as an effectual screen. Nevertheless, there was a lightening of the intense blackness which had marked the previous voyage.

The ship carried lights until she picked up the mainland, then she cloaked them. Pierre was taking the shortest route to the cave and was hugging the coast, which he evidently knew by heart, to use a local phrase. No man not completely confident as to his knowledge of that coast would have dared sail as Pierre did that night. The land loomed up visibly and now and then the crew even caught sight of a white fringe of breakers.

There was some excitement on board, and

a little grumbling. The men hated to have their leave cut short, but the moodiness caused by this was to a great extent submerged in curiosity as to the reason for the sudden change of plans. Pierre never did anything without a very good reason, and it was not likely that he would risk entering the cave with the tide still two hours to fall without there being urgency of an unusual kind.

Dare and Ben shared in the curiosity and excitement. But their chagrin at having failed to get away from the *Mary* in time to be able to make use of their knowledge in regard to the cave's whereabouts, was great. Ben was able to resign himself to circumstances more than Dare, who, in fact, could not resign himself at all.

All the while the *Mary* was forging along the coast, a white wave at her prow, he was trying desperately to think of some way of escaping and getting word to his father.

Could one escape in the cave? Or would Pierre lock them up again as he had done formerly, as soon as they neared the coast where it was situated? He eyed the land, which loomed up darkly. It was no more than a quarter of a mile away. If he were ashore there he could cut across country and get to Saltern in an hour. He knew the lie

of the land well enough for that, for he had observed it closely as they had passed it on their way to St. Pierre.

But the land might as well have been ten miles away for all the chance there was of his reaching it. Quarter of a mile! He could swim it easily on a night like this. At that thought his heart leaped. Why not swim it? But how to escape so as to avoid pursuit? He took a step backwards in his excitement and stumbled. His hand caught the rail and he steadied himself. The incident showed him a way out. He would pretend to fall overboard. He could do it easily, shout "cramp," dive, and come up some distance away from the schooner. Then, after waiting for the excitement which would follow his loss to cool down, he could strike out for the land.

He had no sooner visualized the feat than he decided on it, despite its hazardous nature. It was a chance, and a sporting chance, to get the news to his father in time to plan the great coup that would end, he felt sure, in the capture of the smugglers. Though his father was lame, he could go to the cave by boat. A crew of loyal men could be raked up somehow. He did not stop to think much of these difficulties. His great desire was to get word to Saltern.

He had no time to lose and he had to plan quickly. Should he confide in Ben? He decided against it. Ben would, he knew, forbid the attempt, and he had promised his father to obey him. There was nothing for it but to let Ben remain in ignorance. It was better for the success of the plan that he should. It would be hard on him, but it could not be helped.

The *Mary* was now nearing Saltern. Dare went to the fo'c'sle, and taking off his heavy boots put on a pair of loose slippers, which could be kicked off easily once he was in the water.

Trousers and a shirt would thus be his only impediments. Having made these preparations he went on deck. The ship was in darkness. He looked ashore and could just descry a line of breakers which betokened, he hoped, a beach. Now was his chance! By the greatest good luck the mate at this moment gave the order to pump the ship. He told Dare to draw a bucket of water. Dare jumped at the chance to fake an accident. The deck was sufficiently dark for his purpose.

Dare approached the side and in the shadow of the rigging, which obscured his movements, threw the bucket overboard.

He began drawing it up hand over hand; then, as he leaned forward to take it in over the rail, he pretended to slip. He gave a shout of alarm and fell into the sea, taking a perfect header.

He dived deep and swam under water towards shore until he was forced to come to the surface. When he emerged the *Mary* was already some distance away, but her engine had been reversed and there were sounds of confusion rising from her deck. Evidently there was some doubt as to who had fallen overboard. He gave a shout of "Cramp!" Immediately there was an answering hail. He shouted "Help!" more feebly, then remained silent and attended upon the event.

He heard suddenly Ben's voice, hoarse with terror: "Show a light! Lower a boat! The boy's drowning!"

And closely following came Pierre's voice: "Knock that old fool on the head! He'll rouse the whole coast. How'd that boy fall overboard? Can you see him? Where is he? Give a shout and if he answers we'll lower a boat."

A guarded shout rang out. Silence followed it. Dare heard someone say: "I heard him shout 'cramp.' He's done for."

"Looks like there's nothing we can do," said Pierre. "We might as well get under way again. We've got no time to lose. Lower the spars."

At this moment Ben, who had evidently been stunned by a blow, began to recover and shout again.

"Put a sock in his mouth!" Pierre could be heard exclaiming. "Take him below and lock him up." Then the *Mary* began to move ahead once again.

Dare, satisfied of the success of his ruse, began to swim shorewards with a steady stroke. The water was smooth under the land and there was no wind, but the sea was terribly cold and he began to fear that he would have a real attack of cramp if he remained in for long.

He had never swum at night before, and at first he felt overwhelmed by the tremendous isolation bred by the darkness. He felt pressed down by it also, and began to realize for the first time what a puny force was his, as he lay in the arms of the eternal mother. Would she bear him up or would she smother him in her embrace?

His imagination began to exaggerate the dangers before him, and suddenly he began to lose confidence. Was he swimming in the

right direction ? How was he to know ? He had dived, and while under water might have turned seawards instead of landwards. It was with great relief that he heard the sound of the breakers ahead of him.

Then he began to be haunted by a fear that he would not find a beach. Suppose he found the land guarded by an unscalable mountain of rock ? But the beach was there. He had seen its white fringe of breakers. He might be able to see it now. He stood upright, treading water, and raised himself as high as possible, but could see nothing but the cliff-head looming repellently in the gloom high up above him. However, it was something to see even that. At least he was sure now he was swimming in the right direction. He must go on. He swam forward, vigorously at first, then less so as the long minutes passed. The surf was near enough now to deafen him to other sounds, and the sea rose in waves which rolled landward and broke, not against a wall of rock, but on a beach. To his great joy and thankfulness, he had found his landing—a narrow strip of shingle between two upright cliffs.

Dare put extra energy into his enfeebled stroke, warmed and strengthened by his success. The last few yards were the most

difficult. He was thrown shorewards in headlong manner, then sucked back yards more than he had gained. Eventually, however, he got near enough the shore to touch the shingle. He stood erect and began to run forward. A sea caught him, knocked him off his feet, and threw him high and dry on the beach.

He lay panting there just long enough to recover his breath, then he began to eye the cliff before him. Was it scalable? It did not rise precipitously, like the cliffs which had their base in deep water. This much he could see in those moments when the young moon peeped from behind a cloud. It sloped back until it merged almost imperceptibly with the grassy headland. Once within reach of that upper incline and he had as good as won through. But before that could be gained the rocky base, steep enough to daunt even the boldest climber, had to be negotiated.

Every moment was of value now, and as soon as he had recovered his breath he set about exploring. The stones cut his feet cruelly. He felt his way along the base of the cliff until he came to a declivity. Water ran down it in the wet season, but now it was dry and filled with stones, dead twigs,

and other rubbish. He felt that this would be a good take-off for his climb. He might even follow it to the top, if the loose rubble in it did not betray his footing.

He made a light leap, and using hands and feet, managed to secure a hold. He straddled his legs as much as possible, and pressing his body well forward so as to maintain his balance, made a move upwards.

The headland seemed an immense distance away. The rock cut his feet more cruelly than the beach and made his hold precarious. But he held firmly to his endeavour. There was no going back now. He had to go upwards or fall. So he went upwards. Step by step, feeling his way, testing every hold, he mounted towards the cliff-top. It was slow, agonizing work, and the concentration needed very fortunately prevented him from thinking overmuch of the peril of his position. Once, about halfway up, he had a sudden vision of the cliff and himself, hanging like a fly to its walls, suspended over the waiting beach below. And suddenly he looked down. The sea lay like a lake of ink, washing the beach with a white cloth. He grew dizzy at the thought of falling. Then, fearing the panic which gripped his vitals, he put all idea of falling

from him and held tenaciously to his purpose.

As he mounted, the cliff grew less steep and facilitated his progress. Eventually, in reaching up a hand for a hold, he touched grass and knew that his climb was near its end. He quickened his movements. Gradually the rock was left behind. He fell on his knees and began to crawl; the cliff was still too steep for him to stand erect. The grass was soothing to his bruised feet. He used hands and knees and feet in negotiating the slippery, grassy slope, and after a last breath-taking effort reached the top, rolling himself on to the level headland, where he lay temporarily exhausted.

His intention, once he had recovered sufficiently to make a move, was to strike inland, and cut across the wooded head of land which separated him from Saltern. He did not know how far he was from the town, but he estimated it at three miles. He thought at first the best plan was to take the short cut, though it entailed the risk of getting lost in the wood. The discovery of a goat track on the edge of the cliff, however, decided him to take the longer but more certain, though far more dangerous, route along the shore. The goat track would, he

thought, enable him to skirt the coast successfully. And he had only to follow it to reach his objective, whereas in the dark wood there was probably little to guide his steps, and he might end by being lost altogether and spending the night in futile searching for a way out.

Having decided on the goat track, he proceeded to prepare for it. He knew he could not long walk in his stockinged feet over such a path. He therefore stripped off his shirt, tore it in two pieces and wrapped up his feet as best he could. The result was very cumbersome, but much more comfortable; and he set out confidently on his jaunt.

Although the night was a dark one, it was not so hopelessly black as to preclude all idea of direction. Dare could descry large solid objects at a distance of ten yards, and the path was dimly visible for two yards or so. This helped him a little, but he had to go very slowly.

There were times when a slip of the foot would have meant a fall of some hundreds of feet; there were other times when the path ran level and free from obstacles, well away from the edge of the cliff. But for the most part it skirted the precipice in a nerve-racking fashion.

The transforming of his shirt into bandages for his feet left the upper part of his body bare, and he flinched at times as the branches of obstructing boughs tore his skin. Fortunately the night was warm and he did not suffer from exposure, despite his recent swim.

He was in splendid condition, and although he had accomplished two dangerous feats and was engaged on another, he felt no fatigue. He experienced an exhilaration which made effort seem almost play.

The darkness was his greatest obstacle. It hid the dangers of the track from him and caused his imagination to play nervy tricks. It made boulders take on the form of crouching creatures and stunted trees appear as men. There were several occasions when he startled and was startled by sheep and goats; but on the whole his path was free from living creatures, except those created by his imagination.

Then suddenly, as he was mounting an incline, he saw a man rise out of the earth before him. He could hardly credit his senses with the apparition, but as if to prove to him that he was not dreaming, another vague shadowy form rose up and followed the first inland.

The darkness hid Dare from them, for he was in the shadow cast by some trees, while they were on the high back of the ridge towards which he was mounting. Excited by the possibility the appearance of these nocturnal figures presented, Dare flung himself down on the turf and waited. Another figure appeared, then another and another, until he had counted ten. Then there was an end.

Each figure had had a hump-like protuberance on its back, and Dare knew as well as if he had been told by Pierre himself that he had seen the smugglers carrying their illicit spoil to their cache.

This incident tempted him to side-track his mission to Saltern and to make a personal investigation of the cache. Fortunately wisdom returned to him in time to prevent him doing this, and he kept to his original venture. He crept up behind the opening in the ground. He would have liked to take a peep down into the cave, but caution forbade. He stopped only long enough to tie his pocket handkerchief to an adjacent bush, then hurried on towards Saltern.

He had an idea that when he passed the next ridge he would see the town. And this proved to be so. To his great joy he saw

Saltern light blinking its warning, and, farther off, the lights of a ship at anchor. The town itself was indicated by one or two late lights, such as those which had marked it on his arrival from St. John's.

Spurred by the thought of a successful end to his endeavour, he left the goat track and struck down straight towards the harbour. The trees had thinned out now sufficiently to enable him to see his way easily, and he soon found himself on a grassy slope which ended at the shore.

He ran down the last few yards, his momentum carrying him knee-deep into the water. He then had to cross the harbour. He did not like the idea of swimming. He had had enough of that for one night. So he set about searching the shore feverishly for a boat, and as they were fairly plentiful he soon found one.

It did not take him long to row to the town side. Once there he hastily tied the boat to the quay and set out at a run for the Customs House.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN STANLEY ACTS

CAPTAIN STANLEY was closeted with the captain of the Revenue cutter *Drake*, which had anchored off Saltern at eleven o'clock that night. Despite the lateness of the hour Captain McDonnell had come ashore to call, some rumours having reached him concerning the attack to which his colleague and friend had been subjected.

An all-night session had thus been inaugurated, for Captain Stanley had much to discuss and much to plan, following the opportune visit of the *Drake*. He gave Captain McDonnell the full story of his activities since reaching Saltern, including the departure of Ben and Dare for St. Pierre. Captain McDonnell felt inclined to deprecate the latter action, but he held his peace, seeing that his friend was already reaping the consequences. For Captain Stanley had been made uneasy and finally alarmed by the continued silence of the two adventurers.

"I'd look upon it as a personal favour,"

he said to Captain McDonnell, "if you would call at St. Pierre and set inquiries on foot. I admit now that I made a mistake in sending those two there. I should have known that those smuggling fellows were unscrupulous and that if they ever came to suspect Ben and Dare it would go hard with them. Of course, there may be some simple reason for their silence. But I have my fears."

"I'll call there, certainly," said McDonnell. "We'll leave the first thing at daybreak."

Captain Stanley nodded and continued: "Then, if you don't mind, I'd like you to come back here and help me clean up this nest. I'll borrow your crew for a land attack. I'll find that cache or know the reason why. It's time the high-handed actions of those fellows were put a stop to."

"We'll back your moves, certainly," said McDonnell vigorously. "I'd give a good deal to see those fellows put under restraint. They've made me a joke on the coast for years. Of course, as you know, except for chasing bait pirates we're not much use here. We're almost helpless so far as the liquor trade is concerned. We can't stop every small boat we see on suspicion. That would be only trouble for nothing, for these fellows, I am convinced, run only on dark nights and

usually when the *Drake* is on another route. For they're well informed. I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't know I was here now; at least, I'm sure they've heard I'm due within twenty-four hours, for I took care to make it known at St. Mary's that I should be here then. But I altered my course and got here about fourteen hours ahead of time. I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to get here before I was expected, considering all the circumstances."

"You did well," Captain Stanley assured him, then broke into a sudden exclamation. For there had sounded at the door a series of loud, insistent knocks. Knocks at that time of the night, or morning, rather! Both men stared at each other; Captain Stanley in a sort of dread.

"One of my fellows, I expect," said McDonnell, "though why he's come I don't know. I'd better go down and open the door, hadn't I?"

"Yes, yes, go down," commanded Captain Stanley, and literally pushed his friend from the room.

A very few minutes later Captain McDonnell returned, his face transfigured with excitement.

"Stanley, here's news, good news!" he

shouted joyously, and dragged Dare into the room; a Dare naked to the waist, covered with sweat through which oozed blood from one or two deep scratches, his feet ragged bundles of cloth, his riotous hair tumbling over eyes ablaze with excitement.

"Good heavens!" cried Captain Stanley. "Dare, my boy! Are you hurt?"

Dare fervently shook the hand he found in his. "Not a bit!" he gasped, for he was winded a little. "Fit as a fiddle . . . I've just escaped . . . listen——"

"Not a word!" broke in his father authoritatively; "not a word! Rub him down, McDonnell, he's wet and chilled. I'll rouse Martha and get him a dry shift. There's spirits in the cupboard. Give him a dose."

Dare was forced to submit to these ministrations. Several times he essayed to tell his story, pleading urgency, but his father would not hear a word of it till he was once more in dry clothes, with the warmth of the spirit coursing through his veins.

Then he was permitted to speak. He told his story quickly, beginning with the hour they had left Saltern and leading up to his dramatic escape and subsequent adventures. Both auditors failed to conceal their aston-

ishment and even horror at the risks he had taken. But they were too much occupied by the dramatic development his adventures had made possible to censure him at the moment.

"McDonnell, we've got them!" exclaimed Captain Stanley.

"We have, indeed!"

"Now as to plans—— What a bit of luck, your turning up on this night of all nights! I must have your crew."

"And myself with them, I hope?"

"Of course. Now, Dare, my boy, you're sure of your facts? Near the Table, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"I've passed it a dozen times. There is a hole in the cliff there. A good-sized one, when you go near it. But I could never have believed it is what you say if I hadn't been told. I remember the first time I saw it the fisherman who was with me explained why it was known locally as the Oven. He said that there was deep water inside and no beach, and that the suction and noise of the sea forcing itself into the chasm made a noise like that of a lot of copper pans being banged about. So some local wit called it the Oven. I never dreamed that it was practicable for the smugglers' purposes, a cave

without a beach ! Of course, I never imagined a back exit. Who would, looking at the solid face of the cliff ? Why, the old fisherman even warned me not to enter it, giving as a reason the fact that there were huge splinters of rock hanging from its roof and that from time to time there were regular avalanches of these splinters, so that it was highly dangerous to go into the cave. And I believed him, for certainly the fishermen never seemed to go near it. Well, it's a lesson to me not to overlook even the remotest possibility after this.

" McDonnell, we must attack from both ends. I'll have to nab them at the sea end because of my leg, which prevents me from walking. I'll take one of your boats and a good crew. We'll make our way to the Oven and lie off it, waiting for your signal. For I want you to take a dozen men and go with Dare to the land entrance. You think you can find it, Dare ? "

" Absolutely, sir ! It's on the top of the second ridge near the cliff-end, and to make sure I could find it again I tied my handkerchief to a bough."

" Good boy ! You say they come out in single file ? "

" Yes, sir."

"That gives you a perfect chance to nab them one by one as they come out, McDonnell. Knock 'em on the head and tie 'em up, and when you've got the shore gang fast, flash us a signal from the cliff-top with your flashlight—three long and one short—then we'll close in by water and nab the schooner and her crew. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Captain McDonnell.

"Then we ought to be on our way at once. Your boat's crew is on the quay, I suppose?"

"I expect so. That's where I left them."

"Then if you'll give me an arm and my stick we'll go there right away. I'm afraid we won't be in time. Come on, Dare."

Stopping only long enough to speak a few reassuring words to Martha regarding Ben's safety, the party left the house.

On the quay they found the boat's crew waiting, and were soon rowed on board the *Drake*. Here the crew were roused and divided into two parties of eight men each. Arms were served out, for it was felt the smugglers would put up a determined resistance. Then Captain McDonnell took to one boat with Dare and his crew, and Captain Stanley took to the other, with the *Drake's* second officer as his second-in-command.

"Give us half an hour to get there,

Stanley; then row to the cave. Don't frighten them at your end before we've nabbed the shore crew. From what Dare says, however, the noise in the cave is such that they won't hear anything till we're suddenly among them."

"Right you are," said Captain Stanley. "Keep an eye on Dare. He's taken enough risks for one night."

"Ready? Push off!" ordered McDonnell, and his boat went surging harbourwards at a great rate.

The crew beached her near the spot where Dare had found a boat a little while before, then stepped ashore, moving quietly and efficiently. Captain McDonnell spoke to one of them, and the man stooped and filled a large pocket handkerchief with sand, knotting the cloth into the shape of a bag. The result was a silent, formidable weapon.

He then told Dare to take the lead, and the climb up the incline began. Dare, though a little tired by excitement and physical effort, showed no outward signs of fatigue. He led the crew swiftly and well, and they soon approached the ridge near which the entrance to the cave was situated. They gained the vicinity of the entrance without having given the slightest

cause for an alarm. The men fell on hands and knees in negotiating the last few yards. At last Dare discovered his handkerchief and a halt was signalled. The men were ranged immediately behind the entrance, so that the smugglers would emerge with their backs to them.

Captain McDonnell drew one of the crew to his side and whispered an order. "We'll let the first man who comes out go, so that we can find out where the cache is. Follow him and don't let him get away or give an alarm."

The man nodded and saluted. Captain McDonnell then turned to the sailor whom he had bade fashion the sandbag. "Hit every man who comes out after the first fellow, so that you don't have to hit twice," he ordered. "Two men will ease them down to the ground to prevent a noise. The others will tie them up and lay them on one side. Every man is to be treated in the same way. No unnecessary noise, if you value your extra pay."

There was silence then. Dare, who was not the least excited of the crew, felt as though his breath was being emitted in stentorian snorts, which would surely warn the smugglers of his and his companions' presence.

The suspense of waiting did not last long,

however. There suddenly sounded a noise as though a foot had slipped on a pebble. It was followed by a human grunt, and the muffled sound of human speech. The waiting men stiffened expectantly. Then, when they had begun to wonder if they had not been deceived, and even to be subjected to the fear that they had arrived too late, a man's head and shoulders rose out of the middle of the bushes behind which they were crouching. He was carrying two or three heavy cases hung sling-fashion from his shoulders, and went staggering inland. The member of the crew detailed to follow him slipped quietly in his wake, and both were soon lost sight of in the darkness.

The watchers sighed with relief. They were in time, and the coup had begun well. Without warning another man appeared. The sandbag descended on his head as he set foot in the open. Two of the sailors caught him as he sagged, and lowered body and plunder to the ground. Quickly others of the crew dragged both away.

Captain McDonnell counted the seconds as they passed. Dare, his heart beating at a suffocating rate, did likewise. Three men then appeared so close behind each other that the last emerged before his predecessor

could be dragged from his path. His suspicions were aroused, but before he could cry out the sandbag fell once again. There was a dull report as man and packages crashed to the earth, but no alarm was taken. Five more men appeared in quick succession. Each was treated in similar fashion, and the whole proceeding was carried out so expertly that those in the cave had not the slightest suspicion of the Nemesis on their track.

"I think that's all the shore crew," whispered Dare, when the tenth man had been trussed. "I counted ten the other time."

"We'll wait five minutes," said Captain McDonnell. "Then, before those in the cave can get uneasy about these fellows, we'll signal your father and he can take them by surprise as we planned."

The five minutes passed without anyone appearing. Captain McDonnell then took an electric torch from his pocket and made his way to the edge of the cliff. Holding the torch so that it would be visible from below, he flashed it on and off—three long and one short. He waited anxiously for a minute, then saw a single spot of light show for an instant below. His signal had been received. He hurried back to the waiting crew.

The latter were in a tremendous state of excitement, for they were looking forward to a fight. Hitherto, although the adventure had been of a sporting character, it had not proved exceptionally thrilling. But if, as they expected, Captain McDonnell gave the order to descend into the cave, there would certainly be a fight, and not one of them but, like overgrown schoolboys, was excited by the prospect.

Captain McDonnell noted the change in their attitude and smiled to himself in the darkness. "We'll give the boat five minutes to get into the cave, men," he said cheerfully. But before the five minutes had expired there came from the sea, in the vicinity of the cave, the report of a rifle.

"They've begun!" shouted Captain McDonnell, throwing aside all caution with the disappearance of the need for it. "After me, men!" He leapt into the bushes and disappeared. With a hearty cheer the crew precipitately followed his example. They could be heard tumbling down and shouting warnings to those behind them, warnings which were totally disregarded, for in that moment not one of the party had a thought for his own neck, and they would have leapt a precipice if there was a fight going on at the bottom of it.

Dare, as the youngest and weakest, had been forced to the tail-end of the procession. His turn soon came, however. He leapt into the bushes as recklessly as any of his predecessors and fell with a resounding bump for a distance of ten feet, for at the entrance to the cave the stair was absolutely perpendicular. He picked himself up, felt for broken bones, and not finding any made his way as fast as possible after the rest of the crew. The formation of the passage was such that the tremendous din of the cave did not penetrate it. All Dare could hear was the shouts of the crew ahead. Flares such as he had viewed from the *Mary's* deck lighted his way. The stair followed a zigzag course, and suddenly he found himself in full sight and hearing of the cave. It was about sixty feet below him.

The flares revealed the *Mary* lying by the side of the rock. On her deck were struggling demoniac figures, staggering like drunken men from one rail to the other. And below him, just above the landing-place, Captain McDonnell and his crew were encountering those of the smugglers who, seeing the danger from the sea, had attempted to escape by the stair.

The wildness of the scene, half revealed

in the supernatural light of the flares, held him spellbound. So great was the din given off by the surging water in the cave that no sound of the furious battle in progress rose above it. Voices, blows, oaths, and cries of pain and alarm were drowned by the great voice of the cave, which seemed to exert itself in an effort to obliterate every human sound in its vicinity.

Now and then in the light of the flares Dare saw an agonized face, a lifted weapon; but no sound accompanied either revelation. It was as if the fight were being carried on in dumb-show.

He hurried down the stairs to join in the affray, throwing aside caution, which had no place in any of those there that night. As he neared Captain McDonnell's party, which was gradually forcing the smugglers back on board the *Mary*, where they were being severely handled by Captain Stanley and his crew, he saw one of the fellows escape and make a dart up the stair towards him. He waited for the man to get within jumping distance, then launched himself precipitately upon him.

The smuggler gave a grunt as Dare struck him, and collapsed. Both went rolling over and over down the stairs and, bouncing

past the struggling crew, who were too much occupied to notice them, rolled off the ledge into the water.

Dare, half-winded, felt the smuggler's hold relax and came above water blowing noisily. He saw his opponent rise about the same time and make for the rock, a knife between his teeth. A flare revealed him climbing up the face of the ledge. Then an arm reached out, dragged him over, and clubbed him with a rifle before he could raise a hand in defence.

Dare did not care to risk being treated in similar fashion by his own party in the dark. He looked about him and for the second time that night found himself under the bowsprit of the *Mary*. He clambered into the head rigging and eventually reached the schooner's deck.

The mass of the struggling men were centred aft on the landing side. The smugglers were between two fires, the land party and the sea party, and as they were outnumbered nearly two to one it was only a matter of minutes before they would be overpowered. Nevertheless, they were putting up a desperate resistance. At such close quarters the *Drake's* crew found their rifles worse than useless. Even if they had

desired to fire on the smugglers they could not have done so without bringing down some of their own men. So the battle degenerated into a bout of fisticuffs, with here and there a blow from a stick and the attempted use of a knife.

Dare made a vain effort to force his way between the backs of the sea crew in order to get a chance for a crack at the enemy. Finding his attempt hopeless—for the *Drake's* men were massed shoulder to shoulder in fighting formation—he ran round the cabin so as to reach the landing side farther aft.

As he passed the companion-way he stopped to take a glance down into the cabin. It was deserted. He was about to pass on when he saw the door of the captain's state-room tremble as though under an assault. At the same instant he heard a concerted cry of victory from the *Drake's* men. He did not hesitate longer, but jumped down into the cabin. And as he did so he suddenly remembered Ben. It was Ben, of course, who was in the room! He had heard Pierre give the order to lock him up. And he had forgotten the poor old chap completely until this instant! He ran to the door. The key was in the lock. He turned it, opened the door, and was confronted by Ben.

The old sailor staggered backwards when he saw Dare before him. "Mr. Dare!" he exclaimed, and his voice trembled.

He reached out a horny hand and grabbed Dare's arm as though to convince himself of its solidity. "Mr. Dare!" he exclaimed again, tears of thankfulness and joy in his eyes. "Then you're not drowned?"

Dare wrung the old fellow's hand excitedly.

"No, no, not at all. Why, I *jumped* overboard. I wanted to get word to Saltern, and I didn't tell you for fear you'd prevent me. And I did it, Ben, I did it! We've captured the lot!"

"Then it was fighting I heard?"

"Yes, yes!"

"On deck!" shouted Ben, the light of battle in his eyes. But before they could make a move a wild figure suddenly filled the companion-way, and leaping down into the cabin confronted them menacingly.

It was Pierre. Blood was running down his face. His eyes were bloodshot. His shirt was torn from his body, which gleamed darkly. He had the wild, distracted appearance of one who had suffered overwhelming, humiliating defeat.

When he saw Dare he cried aloud:

"You! Then you didn't drown? Ah, now I see it all! You swam ashore and gave us away, eh? Curse you, you'll suffer for that!"

He leapt towards Dare, who stood his ground. But suddenly he was swept backwards by Ben, who drove in two fists to the charging Pierre's chest. They rang as on hollow wood.

"All right, you first!" raged Pierre, and swung two heavy blows to Ben's head. The latter staggered, then shook off the effect of the blows doggedly. He sprang in and was enfolded by Pierre in a bear-like hug. Ben managed to trip his opponent. They fell to the floor, rolling over and over, kicking, gouging, biting. For Pierre was not in a mood to waste time on finesse; and Ben was forced to meet him with his own methods in an effort at self-preservation.

Dare, his face strained and white, watched the uneven conflict. He knew Ben had no chance in a rough-and-tumble with Pierre, and he sought to aid him before he should be crippled or worse. He hovered round the two, watching his chance. But it was impossible to distinguish between the opponents, so swift and tortuous were their movements.

Then suddenly Pierre managed to drive his knee deep into Ben's stomach. Ben gave an immense sigh as the air was expelled from his lungs, then relaxed his hold and lay helpless. Pierre, as quick as a panther, was on his feet, his face disfigured with hate and rage. He raised his heavily booted foot, aiming at the prostrate figure on the floor.

Dare suddenly felt the red tide of hate rise in himself, a hate of the cowardly and brutal gesture.

"No, you don't!" he shrieked vindictively, and raising the wooden pump-handle he had seized as a weapon when he came on board, he brought it down heavily on Pierre's flaming head.

The heavy, poised foot stopped in mid-air. The kick was never delivered. Pierre was struck suddenly immobile, then his body sagged like a bag of sawdust and he fell to the floor without a word or a cry. The last of the smugglers had been taken.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLOSING OF THE "OVEN"

DARE was standing at the window of his father's office, looking out over the town to where the *Drake* rode at anchor. In the room were Captains McDonnell and Stanley, deep in the details of the coup which had been carried out so successfully that morning. All the smugglers had been taken. Twenty-four in number, they were reposing at that moment in cells which the *Drake* held ready for the detention of such as themselves. Some of them were badly hurt, and most of them carried cuts and bruises, as did the *Drake's* crew. There had been no fatality, however, to the great satisfaction of both Captain McDonnell and Captain Stanley; for the crew of the *Drake* had used only the butt-ends of their rifles, while the smugglers had been caught weaponless save for a few knives. Excepting the shot fired as a signal at the entrance to the cave, no force except that of physical strength had been used against the smugglers,

but that had sufficed. Nine had been taken on the cliff, twelve in the cave, and three at the cache, where that member of the *Drake's* crew detailed for the duty had found them and easily overpowered them with the threat of his rifle.

The cache had yielded a great store of illicit goods of all descriptions. These had been seized and placed on board the *Mary*, which now rode at anchor in Saltern harbour, her hold and her cabin and fo'c'sle sealed, awaiting her fate.

The smugglers were to be taken to St. John's, where they would stand their trial. The coup had been an unprecedented success, in fact, and both Captain Stanley and his colleague were considerably elated at the sudden elimination of a strong, cunning enemy.

That smuggling had been wiped out in Saltern could not be doubted. At least, it would be some time before it raised its head again, and it probably would never attain in the future such proportions as it had done formerly. The capture of the whole gang had been the most important success of Captain Stanley's career in the Revenue Service. The people of Saltern could not hide their surprise, and in some cases their

consternation, at the event. For if the smugglers talked, many of them would be implicated. There was a great deal of destruction of evidence that morning, and many of the villagers eyed each other in some anxiety, wondering what was to happen next. They had been defying the law so long without injury to themselves that its sudden transformation into a Nemesis routed their habitual calm, for each knew himself guilty of receiving benefits from the crime the captured men had committed.

Dare saw them pass in groups before the Customs House, eyeing its windows as if anxious to discover whether it was preparing a like thunderbolt to that which had already been launched, and he could not help smiling a little maliciously, for he had no sympathy with them; not so much as he had for Pierre and his crew, who, at least, faced manfully the penalties of their crimes. These fearful villagers were indirect, weak accomplices for the most part, not one of whom would have boldly run the gauntlet of the Revenue Service as Pierre, the rogue, had.

They did not need to fear for their skins, however. Captain Stanley was more than content in having captured the ringleaders of the trade.

"It's just enough to frighten the villagers out of their bad habits," he said to Captain McDonnell. "Oh, we've ended the trade here, there's no doubt of that."

"I think so," agreed McDonnell. "Well," he added, "that's all the inventory, isn't it? And long enough it is. My men are tickled to death, for I've told them there'll be prize money in it for them. Prize money for them and plenty of glory for us!"

His eyes twinkled merrily as he pronounced the latter words.

"We destroyed that cache completely after we'd taken out the last of the stuff. A perfect hiding-place it was: an immense pit overgrown with brushwood so densely that it was as dry as a lime-kiln. And you might have walked by it a dozen times without seeing it. We set fire to the brush, and now all that's left of the cache is a hole in the ground."

"A good business!" declared Captain Stanley emphatically.

"Aye. Now, as to the *Mary*—— She's moored, I warrant you, so that she's as safe as if she was beached. I'll leave you five of my men under the bo'sun to guard her and her cargo until the court makes the order to have her fetched to St. John's."

"Five will be enough. I'm not very doubtful of the temper of the men here. They're cowed, and I think that now Pierre and his fellows are locked up they'll lose any initiative they ever had. Still, we won't take risks, for the *Mary* is a prize of considerable value as she stands."

"That's so. And speaking of prizes, I shall recommend that man of yours for a good competence. It's impossible to overestimate the value of his and Dare's work. My word, Stanley, that boy of yours is a good plucked one!"

Captain Stanley flushed with pleasure and looked in Dare's dir ction. Dare had heard his name pronounced and had turned inquiringly. His father beckoned him to approach.

"Well, Dare, my boy, we've settled up the odds and ends of this business. It's been the most complete success, thanks to you and Ben. You took risks that I could never approve of, but the results have been so splendid that I've had no difficulty in promising Captain McDonnell to overlook that part of the affair. You did splendidly, my boy, splendidly. But I'll spare your blushes. Besides, if I'm not mistaken, you'll hear more of this from another and a higher quarter."

"That's so," interpolated Captain McDonnell. "The Government will learn of your services, my lad, both through the official report and the medium of your humble servant. And as you've saved them some thousands in revenue and gained them a great deal more in seizures, you can count on them doing the right thing."

"But I don't want them——" began Dare, considerably abashed by the turn the conversation had taken, though he could not help feeling delight in having earned the praise of his superiors.

"Of course you don't, boy," interrupted Captain McDonnell, "but that's neither here nor there. You've been of service, and as it's a Government affair things must take their proper course. Now, as to the present—— But you'd better break this to him, Stanley."

Dare looked at his father questioningly. Captain Stanley returned the look, smiling gravely.

"I've decided, Dare, and Captain McDonnell supports my decision, that it's best for you to leave Saltern now that our object in coming here has been attained. The temper of the villagers is uncertain. They're disappointed and scared, and at

such times people are apt to be excessive in their demonstrations of emotion. It's not that there's any great danger, but they know of the part you played in the cleaning up of the gang and they don't feel very friendly towards you, to say the least; and under the circumstances I'd rather that you left here as soon as possible.

"I'll be following you shortly myself. As soon as the *Mary* is taken to St. John's, someone will be sent to relieve me and in time a permanent official will be appointed. Then we'll do some hunting and fishing in the Humber Valley. In the meantime I hope you won't mind obliging me by leaving here alone. I won't order you to go; you've earned the right to decide for yourself, but I own I'll be considerably relieved if you'll consent to follow my advice."

Dare flushed.

"Of course, dad," he burst out impulsively, "whatever you wish——"

"But where am I to go?" he asked, when his father had placed his hand on his shoulder to show his approval.

"Ah! that will interest you, I think. Captain McDonnell has offered to take you cruising in the *Drake* for a month."

"Dad!"

Both Captain Stanley and Captain McDonnell smiled at that enthusiastic, forceful exclamation.

"Appeals to you, eh?" chuckled McDonnell.

"Rather!" ejaculated Dare. "There's nothing I'd like better, seeing I can't stay on here."

"Then be on board by five o'clock."

* * * * *

At half-past five the *Drake* broke out her anchor and, dipping her flag to the Customs House ensign, slowly got under way. When she reached the Oven she slackened speed, and a gun was trained on the former harbour of the smugglers. The shell expelled from it struck the face of the cliff just above the narrow opening. There came a report as though the cliff itself had split in twain, then hundreds of tons of loosened rock fell to form a barrier for all time to the entrance to the cave.

Dare, who was with Captain McDonnell on the bridge, witnessed the result with considerable satisfaction.

"Well, that's the end of the Oven," he said.

"And a jolly good thing too," said Captain

McDonnell. Then he reached out a hand and rang "Full speed ahead" to the engine-room.

And the *Drake*, shuddering from stem to stern at the sudden revolutions of her propeller, leapt forward like a greyhound, and with a white wave at her prow headed jauntily for the open sea.

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